

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE LIFE AND NOVELS OF BANKIMCHANDRA

BY

JAYANTA KUMAR DAS GUPTA, M.A., Ph.D.

VICE-PRINCIPAL, DURBAR COLLEGE, REWA

*(Thesis approved for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in the University of London)*

CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY

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FOREWORD

The study of the life and works of Bankimchandra Chatterjee is a source of absorbing interest for the student of Bengali language and literature. For, the age in which he lived is one of the most fruitful periods in the history of its growth. Bengali prose was still in the making. The influence of Raja Rammohun Roy who was undoubtedly the pioneer of Bengali prose had produced a remarkable renaissance of Bengali literature and philosophy. His writings gave an unprecedented impetus to the development of Bengali prose. Pandit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar more than anyone else carried the movement still further. A most marvellous effect of this movement was the creation of a fiction literature in Bengali under the influence of English novels. It will be remembered that Bankimchandra's earliest attempts in this direction were in English. But his creative genius very soon threw off the shackles of a foreign tongue and like Michael Madhusudan Dutt turned to the treasure house of the mother tongue. Before this, Bengali fiction was in its infancy and barring the inimitable work of Tekchand, there was hardly any novel worth the name in decent Bengali prose. Whatever there was in the nature of fiction was practically confined to a few poems and ballads and possibly to some prose translations.

It must be admitted that the writing of modern fiction derived its greatest inspiration from Bankimchandra. For it was he who for the first time pressed into its service an elegant, chaste and a most expressive prose style. So long the recognised mode of expression was poetry and Bankimchandra inherited a rich legacy of poetical literature from his predecessors. Even in his days the influence of poetry continued unabated and there was a galaxy of poets including Iswar Gupta, Michael Madhusudan, Dinabandhu and Rangalal. But when Bengali prose began to develop, its immense possibilities became at once evident to those who had the gift of literary vision.

It was found eminently suitable not only for the exposition of abstruse religious and philosophical subjects but also for the expression of creative Art, and in Bankimchandra we find an artist whose imagination was as fertile as his scholarship was profound. He may be said to have created a new style of prose and employed it to the best advantage. Of course he drew largely upon the storehouse of Sanskrit literature and the Vaisnava poetry of the mediæval period in both of which he appears to have been well versed. His style was characterised by spontaneity, vigour and a rare sense of proportion. He knew when to draw upon Sanskrit literature and when to use the colloquial style in vogue among the people. That is why his writings have passed into the classics of Bengali literature. His style often resembles the soft and graceful flow of lyrical poetry. The development of a prose style was perhaps Bankimchandra's

greatest individual achievement. It has accordingly been largely imitated by his successors as neither the style of Rammohun nor that of Iswarchandra has been.

Bankimchandra has rightly been regarded as the maker of the Bengali novel, and two of the greatest living novelists of our time, *viz.*, Rabindranath Tagore and Saratchandra Chatterjee, may be said to be his literary descendants. So far as technique and method of novel-writing are concerned, it is interesting to note that Rabindranath was profoundly influenced by Bankimchandra whose admiration and esteem he won in his youth.

The popularity of Bankimchandra as a novelist has not diminished to any very great extent. A certain section of critical opinion still places him in the front rank of the world's greatest novelists. At any rate, it may be said without hesitation that Bankimchandra has not gone out of fashion in the sense in which Sir Walter Scott or George Eliot has gone out of fashion in England. The reason for this seems to be that Bankim was not only an able writer of fiction, but also a philosopher and reformer. A philosopher often sees further afield than the mere politician or chronicler. In the writings of Bankimchandra, there is to be found a philosophical vein and a patriotic fervour which lead one to think sometimes that they were inspired. This comes out equally clearly when he is engaged in the exposition of the fundamental principles of Ethics in his 'Dharmatattwa' or when he is vindicating the character of Srikrishna in his 'Krishna Charitra' or when he is depicting the

picture of a united Bengal in his 'Kamalakanta's Durgotsab.'

The spirit of Nationalism which appears in this last-named composition has inspired his great work 'Ananda Math' and carried his fame far outside the borders of his native province. There is no doubt that so long as Nationalism will provide the bond of union between the different parts of India, the name of Bankimchandra will continue to be cherished by the people of this great sub-continent. From all these considerations, I believe the present publication will be welcomed by the public and I congratulate Dr. Jayantakumar Dasgupta on his successful presentation of a critical study of the life and works of the greatest novelist of Bengal.

CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY

October 10, 1936.

KHAGENDRANATH MITRA.

PREFACE

I am grateful to the authorities of the Calcutta University for the generous extension of their patronage to me by publishing this book. Rai Khagendranath Mitra Bahadur, M A , Ramtanu Lahiri Professor of Bengali, Calcutta University, has done me a great favour by writing a foreword to it. To Mr W Sutton Page, O.B.E , B.A., B D., Reader in Bengali in the University of London, I am thankful for his kind interest in the preparation of this work. The Library staff of the India Office, the British Museum, the India House and the London School of Oriental Studies deserve my thanks for their unfailing courtesy and assistance whenever I had occasion to consult works of reference at these places. I also take the opportunity of thanking Mr A C Ghatak, M A , Superintendent, University Press, and his staff for the care with which they have supervised the printing of the book.

J K DAS GUPTA

TRANSLITERATION

The system of transliteration followed is that adopted by the Royal Asiatic Society. The inherent vowel *a* has, however, been omitted in places where it is silent in Bengali. In cases where a *buphalā* simply doubles the consonant to which it is attached it has been represented by *o*. Otherwise no distinction has been made in transliteration between the *bargīya ba* and the *antahstha ba*, as both are usually pronounced in Bengali as *b*. There are, however, many well-known Indian names, *e.g.*, Vidyāsāgar, Vāsavdattā, Ratnāvalī, etc., which have been transliterated as Sanskrit words with *o* instead of *b*.

ABBREVIATION

B. Y denotes the Bengali year of publication of periodicals and journals in Bengali.



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A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE LIFE AND NOVELS OF BAÑKIMCANDRA

CHAPTER I

BENGALI NOVELISTS BEFORE BAÑKIMCANDRA

Baṅkimcandra Cattopādhyāya (Chatterjee) is generally regarded as the creator of the Bengali Novel, but it would be doing an injustice to some of the earlier writers if the entire credit of this achievement were to be given to him. Therefore, before dealing with Bankimcandra himself, it may be worth while to enquire what works of fiction he found already in existence. There were, of course, stories in Bengali long before there was anything that could be strictly called a novel. In the main the aim of these earlier stories was didactic and moralistic. Sanskrit literature furnished examples of prose fiction and no doubt Bengali writers knew of the existence of romances like *Kādambarī*, *Daśakumārācarita*, *Vāsavadattā*, popular tales like *Kathāsaritsāgara*, *Bṛhatkathā* and moral tales of the type of the *Pañcatantra* and *Hṛtopadeśa*.

In Bengal there was a class of people known as "Kathaks," whose vocation it was to tell stories, chiefly of a religious nature, based on the Purāṇas and other mythological books. There were also tales for

children which have been handed down from generation to generation and are still told to young people in Bengal, often by their grand-parents, elderly relatives, nurses and attendants¹ In all these stories little care was paid to characterisation and plot-construction, and there was very little attempt on the part of the story-tellers to find any solution to the eternal problems confronting human life, nor was there any serious treatment of the conflicts of passions and sentiments that agitate the human mind Their world was far removed from the actualities of everyday life, an enchanted fairy land of pure marvels, where a wandering prince brought back to life a sleeping beauty with the gentle touch of his magic wand, or a demon-haunted kingdom, where the heart of a bee hidden in a tiny jewel-case secreted below a tank held the lives of thousands of *rāksasas* There were in some of these tales occasional glimpses of the social conditions of the people, but they were imaginative stories, and not studies from real life Some of them had a romantic background, but were far too full of fancy and imagination and they entirely lacked that realism which plays such a prominent part in modern fiction

Prominent among the writers of the first quarter of the 19th century in Bengal was Bhabānīcaran Bandyopādhyāya (1787-1848), who edited *Samācār Candrikā*, a Bengali weekly periodical of considerable influence in its own day Bhabānīcaran also edited for some time *Sambād Kaumudī* and was secretary of the Dharma Sabhā, which was the mouthpiece of the

¹ Cf. *Thākurdādār Jhulī* *Thākurmūr Jhulī*, etc.

orthodox Hindus in Calcutta Under the nom-de-plume of Pramathanāth Śarmā he wrote a satirical work, *Nababībubilās* (1823), which contains a vivid picture of social life in Bengal in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.¹ The book was immensely popular in its day, but perhaps its importance has been over-valued.² It was, no doubt, important as the first attempt at a sketch of social life, but it is spoilt by a peculiar style and by its mixture of Bengali and non-Bengali words. As a realistic account of society, however, it is interesting The subject-matter of the book, as clearly stated in the preface, is the luxury practised by the sons of those, who amassed wealth by foul means. Even several years after its publication it appears to have been still popular³

A far more important work was *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl* (1858).⁴ Its author Pyāricāḍ Mitra (1814-1883), who wrote under the pen-name of Tekcāḍ Thākur was a gifted person He was a social reformer of the Derozio school and was associated with various societies and public institutions in Calcutta Amidst his multifarious activities, he found time to

¹ *Nababībubilās* has been described by James Long as the career and vagaries of a modern Babu—Catalogue of the Vernacular Literature Committee's Library, p 5 That the educated Bengali gentleman was not in those days what he should have been is clearly evident from contemporary accounts of him—Calcutta Journal, September 10th, 1822, September 19th, 1822, Asiatic Journal, 1822, p 285, Calcutta Review, 1850, p 160

² D C Sen, *Bengali Prose Style*, pp 21-22

³ *Samācār Candrikā*, 27th January, 1831, p 576

⁴ Translated into English by G D Oswell, 1893, by N N Mitra and M S Knight, *Journal of the National Indian Association*, 1882-83

contribute to various periodicals in English and Bengali published in Calcutta and also to spiritualist journals in England and America. The credit of being the first Bengali novelist is generally accorded to him. H. A. D. Phillips regarded *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl* as "a truly indigenous novel" ¹

That Pyāricād regarded his work as a novel is clear from his introduction in English to this book. "The above original Novel in Bengali being the first work of the kind, is now submitted to the public with considerable diffidence. It chiefly treats of the pernicious effects of allowing children to be improperly brought up, with remarks on the existing system of education, on self-formation and religious culture, and is illustrative of the condition of Hindu society, manners, customs, etc., and partly of the state of things in the Mofussil" ²

This raises the question of the introduction of the word "Novel" into Bengali. In Sanskrit there are the terms "*Kathā*" and "*Ākhyāyikā*". The former according to an authoritative writer on Sanskrit Poetics would be equivalent to the word "Novel." ³ But it has been remarked, "The least part of the Sanskrit romance is the thread of the story or adventures of its characters, all the stress is laid on rhetorical embellishment, minute description of nature, and detailed

¹ Preface to "Kopalkundala"

² It is rather peculiar that he should have prefixed an introduction in English to this work. There is also a Bengali introduction. Yādugopāl Caṭṭopādhyāya wrote a preface in English to a Bengali story—*Hatabhāgya Murād*. There is an introduction in English to *Brhatkathā*, Pt 1, by Ānandacandra Vedāntabāgīś

³ J. Nobel, *Foundations of Indian Poetry*, p 175

characterisation of exploits and of mental, moral and physical qualities "1 The nearest approach in Bengali to the word "Novel" would be "*upanyās*," but strictly speaking for a long time no distinction was made in Bengali between the words "*upanyās*" and "*galpa*." In *Bibidhārtha Samgraha* the story of a man and a *gandharba* is called *Saraler Upanyās* and the story of a shoe-maker who became an astrologer is styled *Pādukākār Ganaker Upanyās*.³ Harināth Majumdar refers to the word "Novel" in *Bijay Basanta* (1859), but he meant by it an allegorical tale (*rūpak itihās*)⁴ Pandit Lālmohan Vidyānidhi defined "*upanyās*" as a "*nātakātmak ākhyāyikā*."⁵ But the word "*upanyās*" had been familiar in Bengali for some time past even before that In reviewing stories and tales *Bibidhārtha Samgraha* was applying the term "*upanyās*" to them⁶ Gopinohan Ghos, author of a

¹ Vāsavadattā, Tr L H Gray, p 37, Vienna Oriental Journal, 1904, Literary Studies on the Sanskrit Novel

² Tārāsankar Tarkaratna refers to the word "*galpa*" in the preface to *Kādambarī* and Kālīprasanna Ghosāl refers to it in the preface to *Mālatīmādhav*

³ Śaka 1773, Phālgun, Śaka 1775, Kārtik Besides the words "*galpa*" and "*upanyās*" there were other terms, e g, "*upākhyān*," "*ākhyāyikā*" to signify to a tale or a story The use of the word "*upākhyān*" is found in works like *Nalopākhyān*, *Manohar Upākhyān*, *Nalinikānta*, *Basupālītopākhyān*, *Bāsantikā*, *Bijayballabh*, *Jayābatir Upākhyān*, *Pranayprabāha*, etc Harināth Śarmā's *Mudrārākṣas* and Rāmgatī Nyāyaratna's *Romābatī* are described as "*ākhyāyikā*"

⁴ Cf *Nītibodhak Itihās* (1849), *Sulalit Itihās* (1853), in the sense of a story "*Itihās*" in the sense of a story is used by Gurudās Hājūrī in *Romio ebam Juliet* *Manohar Upākhyān* (1848)

⁵ *Kābyanirnay*, pp 14-15

⁶ 1858, Part 51, p 72 The use of the term "*upanyās*" in the general sense of a story is found in works like *Nilmamani* Bāṅla

tale, *Bijayballabh* (1863) distinctly wrote in the preface that his work was written after the manner of those stories known in the English language as “*nabal*”¹

The term “*Novel*” denotes in English “a study of manners, founded on an observation of contemporary or recent life, in which the characters, the incidents and the intrigue are imaginary, and, therefore, ‘new’ to the reader, but are founded on lines running parallel with those of actual history”² Sir Walter Scott defined a novel as “a fictitious narrative, differing from the romance, because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events, and the modern state of society”³ Both *Nababūbubilās* and *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl* conform to these definitions. But the criticism that Pyāricād plagiarised the earlier novel is without any basis⁴ Such pictures of contemporary life were becoming popular with Bengali writers and Pramathanāth Sarmā was not the only one in the field. The *Bibidhārtha Samgraha* was quite correct when it said that although the model of *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl* was *Nababūbubilās*, Pyāricād’s tone is more dignified and his satire more brilliant.⁵

Baṅkimcandra remarked that Pyāricād first showed Bengali writers that they need not go to Sanskrit or

Ārabya Upaṇyās, Tārakcandra Cūrāmanī’s *Mālabikāgnimitra* which was published in 1859 in *Bibidhārtha Samgraha*, Kedārnāth Datta’s *Baṅkacarit* and Rāmkaṇī Bhaṭṭācāryya’s *Adbhūt Upaṇyās*

1 Rājnarāyaṇ Basu regarded Gopīnohan as the first Bengali novelist — *Bāṅgālā Bhāṣā o Sāhitya*, p. 52

2 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, Vol. XIX, p. 833

3 *Essays in Chivalry, Romance and the Drama*, p. 65

4 D. C. Sen, *Bengali Prose Style*, p. 24

5 Śaka 1780, Parba V, Caitra, Pt. 60

any other literature for materials and he declared that *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl* was the beginning of Bengali prose literature based on materials to be found in Bengali homes¹ Bankimcandra had occasion to write once more "The language of *Ālāl* is easy and its contents are full of sound instruction. If novels are written in this way people would read them and the new literature of Bengal would become popular."² The *Bibidhārtha Samgraha* wrote, "Calcutta has no lack of Matilals. Perhaps readers will be able to find one or two Matilals in their own locality."³

Pyārīcād's aim was to create a better moral atmosphere in Bengali society. The characters are real and lifelike. The men and women depicted are representative inhabitants of the metropolis and the villages. The village landlord Bakreśvar, his thoroughly worthless son Matilāl, the evil-minded Thak cācā, Mr Butler the lawyer, Baradā Bābu the ideal gentleman, fill up the canvas of this work. There are glimpses of the administration of justice in Calcutta, the Police Court, the High Court Sessions and the Grand Jury, the Court of the Magistrate in a district town, early morning scenes in the city, the oppression of indigo-planters, the insanitary conditions of Calcutta and schools for English education.

Ālāler Gharer Dulāl depicts a time when learning commanded little respect, when religion was at its lowest ebb and when wealth counted for much in social

¹ Tekcāder Granthāvalī, p. iv

² Sāhitya, Vol. XXIV, p. 103, Collected Works of Bankimcandra, Vol. I, p. 668

³ Śaka 1779, Parba V, p. 46

prestige. It was not biting satire that Tekcād used for exposing the evils of his days. He introduced a deep moral vein in his story and was absolutely faithful to reality. His humour is never coarse like that of many other writers of the same period. Drinking, licentiousness, polygamy and every kind of moral and social vice he attacked with forcefulness, yet in a style of simplicity and naturalness. If he was hard on the leisured rich, he compensated for his harshness by the pathos with which he described the life of the poor. It is not simply the *baithakkhānā* of the Bengalis of those days that Tekcād depicts. He describes with sympathy the inner apartments of the Bengali household. In his story nothing is unreal, or absurd, or obviously out of place. Even the poetasters of the age were not spared. Tekcād made fun of them in pieces of poetry, introduced now and then in the course of the story. The book is a landmark in Bengali literature as a description of Bengali life, the real life of the people in their homes, not only the more beautiful side of it, but even its squalid aspects.

Pyāricād's *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl* is further noteworthy from the point of view of style. The Sanskritists had for a long time held sway in the domain of Bengali prose. They wrote in a style far too difficult for ordinary people to understand. Pyāricād gave a lead in the direction of simple prose as it is used in everyday life. The pedantic language which was too long held in reverence by the high priests of literature was completely disregarded by him and he proved that the language of everyday life could be used for serious

writing also.¹ It has been pointed out that the style adopted by Pyāricād is not original and had already been used.² Still, he remains as the first well-known Bengali writer, who successfully yoked a simple style to the treatment of a serious subject.

Poverty of subject-matter has been noticed as one of the characteristics of Bengali literature between 1700 and 1850. Much of the literary possibilities which could be borrowed from Sanskrit had already been used up. Tekcād made a departure from the customary subjects which had appealed so long to Bengali writers. He made use of the Bengali sense of humour and gift of description which go to make good fiction.³ But he stopped after beginning the pioneer work. He had interests in other directions and could not concentrate himself on one sphere of activity. It was left for a greater genius, Bankimcandra, to provide a vaster range and wider variety of subject-matter for the novel and as life grew more complex in Bengal under the influence of a foreign culture, Bengali fiction assumed a richer and fuller form.

¹ Pyāricād was followed soon after by another able writer, Kālīprasanna Simha (1810-70), who in *Hutom Pyācār Naksā* (1862), used the colloquial style throughout. The title of this work is given as *Hutom Pecār Naksā* by S. K. Chatterji.—*The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, Pt. 1, p. 135.

² D. C. Sen, *Bengali Prose Style*, pp. 17-18.

³ *Indian Art and Letters*, 1927, p. 14.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER I

The following is a list of some other works of fiction in Bengali before Bankimcandra's novels.—

Rāselās—Mahārājā Kālikr̥ṣṇa, 1833

Vāsavadattā—Madanmohan Tarkālamkār, 1837

Nītibodhak Itihās—Kṛṣṇamohan Bandyopādhyāya, 1849.

Ārabya Upanyās—Nilmani Basāk, 1850.

Kāphrīdāser Br̥ttānta, Translated from the English of
L Richmond, 1851

Phulmanī o Karunār Bībaran—Mrs. Mullens, 1852

Sulalit Itihās—Rāmlāl Mītra, 1853.

Nababibīlās—Bholānāth Bandyopādhyāya, 1853

Kādambarī—Tārāsankar Tarkaratna, 1853

Nalopākhyān—Harānanda Bhaṭṭācāryya, 1855.

Priyambadā—Kedārnāth Datta, 1855

Manohar Upākhyān—Harimohan Karmakār, 1855

Daśakumārcarit—Girīścandra Vidyāratna, 1856

Ajendumatīcarit—Dīnabandhu Gupta, 1856

Gopālkāmīnī—Rāmnārāyan Vidyāratna, 1856

Susīlmantrī—Dvārakānāth Rāy, 1856

Cārucarit—Aghornāth Tattvanīdhī, 1857.

Durākāṅkser Br̥thā Bbramaṇ—Kṛṣṇakamal Bhaṭṭā-
cāryya, 1857.¹

Ratnāvalī—Tārakcandra Cuṛāmanī, 1857

Cittabīnod—Rameścandra Mukhopādhyāya, 1857

Rāselās—Tārāsankar Tarkaratna, 1857.

Aitihāsik Upanyās—Bhudeb Mukhopādhyāya, 1857

Br̥hatkathā—Ānandacandra Vedāntabāgīs, Pt I, 1857 ;
Pt II, 1858.

¹ This work was published anonymously Hārāncandra Rakṣit attributed it to Kṛṣṇakamal's brother Rāmkaṁal—Bangasāhitye Baṅkim, p 54 Kṛṣṇakamal in subsequent years admitted the authorship.—Purāṇa Prasāṅga, Bīpinbīhārī Gupta, p 200

- Basupālitopākhyān—Kedārnāth Bandyopādhyāya, 1858
 Mālatīmādhav—Kālīprasanna Ghosāl, 1858
 Telimekas—Rājīśna Bandyopādhyāya, 1858.
 Candramukhīr Upākhyān, 1859
 Bijay Basanta—Harināth Majumdār, 1859.
 Nalinikānta—Kedārnāth Datta, 1859
 Hemprabhā—Dvārakānāth Gupta, 1859.
 Vikramorvaśī—Rāmsaday Bhattācāryya, 1859.
 Mālatīmādhav—Lohārām Śīroratna, 1860.
 Bāsantikā—Jagadīś Tarkālamkār, 1860.
 Harināth Sarmā—Mudrārāksas, 1860
 Nilāambarī—Yogendranāth Cattopādhyāya, 1860.
 Nilānjan—Kedārnāth Cattopādhyāya, 1860.
 Ratnāvalī—Yadunāth Tarkaratna, 1860.
 Vāsavdattā—Jaygopal Gosvāmī, 1861
 Adbhūt Upanyās—Rāmkālī Bhattācāryya, 1861
 Hatabhāgya Murād—Yadugopāl Cattopādhyāya, 1861
 Bañcackarīt—Kedārnāth Datta, 1861
 Purānjan—Abināścandra Cattopādhyāya, 1861
 Romābatī—Rāmgatī Nyāyaratna, 1862
 Atihāsik Upanyās—Bhudeb Mukhopādhyāya, 1862
 Vicitravīrya—Kīśnakamal Bhattācāryya, 1862.
 Vikramorvaśī—Dvārakānāth Gupta, 1862
 Bijayballabh—Gopīmohan Ghos, 1863
 Jayābatīr Upākhyān—Harīmohan Mukhopādhyāya, 1863
 Tamkhuo—Tārinīcaran Cakravartī, 1863
 Pārijātbhāś—Jaynārāyan Bandyopādhyāya, 1863.
 Pranayprabāha—Mabheścandra Kārpharmā 1864.
 Eljābeth—Rāmnārāyan Vidyāratna, 1864 ¹

¹ Since writing this thesis I have critically examined a number of these works in Bhāratbarā, Calcutta, 1341 B Y

CHAPTER II

BAÑKIMCANDRA—THE MAN

The paucity of materials for a biographical sketch of Bañkimcandra makes it impossible to attempt anything beyond a very brief account of his career. The only biography of Bankimcandra, written by his nephew, Śaciścandra Caṭṭopādhyāya, was published in 1911.¹ Unfortunately the work is not free from errors and the real matter in it is of a meagre nature in spite of its having gone through three editions. Bañkimcandra left no record of his views of men and things like many other great writers in diaries or memoirs and his published letters are few.² It is strange that no contemporary of his has written a life of this remarkable man. He did not live in complete isolation it is true, but what was there in him that made others so little enthusiastic about writing his biography? That remains an enigma still. In 1908 a monograph was published by his sister's son Kailāscandra Mukhopādhyāya, who was Bankimcandra's junior by five years and a contemporary at Hooghly College. Kailāscandra recorded a few sayings and opinions of Bankimcandra and some facts about his life. Śaciścandra seems to have used certain materials from this pamphlet, though, strangely enough he makes no acknowledgment of it whatsoever and never even mentions it

¹ Bankim Jibani

² Bengal Past and Present, Vol VIII, Pt II, 1914 (April-June), Sāhitya, Agrahāyaṇ, 1323 B. Y., Prabāsī, Kārtik, 1336 B. Y.

The year 1838 is a famous year in the annals of Bengal. Keśābcandra Sen, the theistic reformer, Kṛṣṇadās Pāl, the publicist, Hemcandra Bandyopādhyāya, the poet and Bankimcandra were all born in that year. Bankimcandra was born at Kātālpārā, near Naihati, in the district of Twenty-four Parganas on the 27th June, 1838. His father Yādābcandra was a Kulin Brāhman and a man of means and position. Bankimcandra had two elder brothers, Śyāmācaran and Sañjibcandra and a younger brother, Pūrnacandra. Bankimcandra's first schooling was at Midnapore, where his father was then a Deputy Collector.

He was not fond of games like many other boys. In 1847 he joined the Hoogly College and it was said of him that excepting Dvārakānāth Mitra, who became a Judge of the Calcutta High Court, no student of that college possessed such genius ¹. There have been several other distinguished students of the same institution—Dīnabandhu Mitra, Aksaycandra Sarkār, Dvijendralāl Rāy, Rt Hon Syed Amir Alī, but Bankimcandra remains the greatest of them all. As a boy he was by nature of studious habits and the range of his studies was wide. It is recorded of him that when he appeared for the first Senior Scholarship examination he was not inferior to the best students in the upper classes in general acquirements and information ².

In 1849 he was married to a young girl. The Bengal of his younger days was different from what it

¹ Bankim Jibānī, p. 30

² A Few Sayings and Opinions of Bankimchandra, by Karleschandra Mukherjee, p. 14

is now Child-marriage was not discouraged, and a girl of five became his wife. In 1857 Bankimcandra entered the Presidency College. Keśabcandra Sen was one of his contemporaries at this institution. There are two remarkable stories of his courage as a young man. On one occasion he sharply reprimanded an English military officer at Chinsurah for teasing a half-crazy boy and on another he rebuked a high English official who had entered the female apartments of his house evidently through mistake.¹ When the Sepoy Mutiny broke out he was in Calcutta and he said to Mr W. A. Montrieux, one of his teachers in Law, "If for a single day I thought that your rule would come to an end, I would have thrown the law books into the waters of the Ganges and returned home."²

The University of Calcutta was founded in 1857. Bankimcandra was one of the few students to sit for the examination for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1858. Of the candidates who had sat for the examination all failed, but the Board of Examiners recommended that two candidates—Bankimcandra and Yadunāth Basu who had passed creditably in five of the six subjects and had failed by not more than seven marks in the sixth might be allowed to have their degrees as a special act of grace, being placed in the second division. The University authorities accepted the recommendation of the Board and Bankimcandra became one of the first two graduates of the University.

¹ *Ibid* pp 34, 89

² Bankim Jībanī, pp 105-06

of Calcutta ¹ He read for this examination among other things Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Dryden's *Cymon and Ephigenia*, and Addison's *Essays*.² At the annual meeting of the University held on the 11th December, 1858, he was presented by the Principal of the Presidency College and admitted to the degree of Bachelor of Arts ³ He had in the meantime been appointed to the Bengal Executive Service as a Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector and taken up his official duties at Jessore in August, 1858

It was at Jessore that he first met Dīnabandhu Mitra with whom he became very friendly During his stay there his wife died In 1859 he was transferred to Nagoya, a subdivision in the Midnapore district and there he came across a Tāntrik priest (Kāpālik) who suggested the Kāpālik of *Kapālkundalā* ⁴ He was married again in the same year He then went to Khulna where his name came into prominence in connection with the suppression of the river dacoits and the measures he adopted in dealing with some unruly indigo planters ⁵ His next official station was Baruipur to which place he was transferred in 1864 At Baruipur he seems to have been very popular ⁶ During his stay there his first two novels, *Durgēś-nandinī* and *Kapālkundalā*, were published In 1867 his merit as an officer was recognised by his appoint-

¹ Minutes of the Calcutta University, 1858, pp 18-19

² Minutes of the Calcutta University, 1857

³ Minutes of the Calcutta University, 1858 p 121

⁴ Bankim Jibani, p 112

⁵ C E Buckland, Bengal under the Lt Governors, Vol II, p 1077

⁶ Sambād Prabhākar, 9th November, 1865

there. The most remarkable and noteworthy event of the latter part of his life was his controversy on Hinduism with Dr. Hastie, a Scottish missionary. This was started in 1882 by Dr. Hastie by a scathing attack on Hinduism in the columns of the *Statesman*. To Dr. Hastie's aspersions on Hinduism Bankimcandra replied under the pen-name of Ram Chandra. He made a masterly defence of Hinduism and cornered the learned Doctor of Divinity, exposing the fallacy of his arguments. He retired from the service in 1891, at the age of fifty-three, after thirty-three years of service. The same year the Government conferred upon him the title of Rai Bahadur as a mark of personal distinction. But public opinion was evidently not placated by what it considered to be an inadequate recognition of his eminence.¹

After he retired he did not allow his varied interests to flag. He was a Fellow of the University of Calcutta and was one of those who advocated the introduction of Bengali as a subject for examinations in that University.² This proposal, however, did not become a reality till after Bankimcandra's death. In October, 1893, he presided over a meeting of the Literary Section of the Society for the Higher Training of Young Men when Śivanāth Sāstrī delivered an address in Bengali on national literature and national character.³ He was for some time President of the Literary Section of this Society. His name appears

¹ Bankim Jibānī, p. 225.

² Nabyabhāra', Bhādra, 1331 B Y, p. 232, Prabāsī, Āśvin, 1330 B Y, p. 885.

³ Calcutta University Magazine, January, 1894, p. 13.

as a member of the English Language and Literature and the Bengali Language and Literature Sub-Committees of the Central Text-Book Committee in 1891. A few months before his death the Government made him a Companion of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire.

Bankimcandra died on the 8th April, 1894, after rendering such services to Bengali literature that he well deserves the title of one of the makers of Bengali thought and culture. One of his well-known contemporaries regarded him as the "Sun of Bengali literature of this century."¹ His death was a national calamity and the whole province felt the void created by it. The Press in Bengal was unanimous in its chorus of appreciation of his genius. One of the most influential periodicals of the day wrote "Those who help in the formation of a language in its early stages, and by their labours enrich it, and invigorate it, are among the truest benefactors of their race. Bankim Chunder Chatterjee will occupy this place of honour in the annals of his country... .. A prince and a great man has fallen."² Another newspaper wrote "By the death of Rai Bunkim Chunder Chatterjee, Bahadur, C.I.E., Bengali literature has suffered an irreparable loss. For not only did his works exercise a healthy influence on the literary tastes of his countrymen, but what is better, they instilled a high moral tone into the educated classes of the native community.... .."

¹ N. C. Sen, *Āmār Jiban*, Vol. IV, p. 280.

² *The Bengalee*, 14th April, 1894.

“Rightly apprehending that a taste for reading would be best developed by attractive works of a light character he applied the energies of a fertile mind to the production, in the first place, of those novels which have made his name a household word among the Bengali community ” ¹

Meetings were held all over Bengal for the purpose of expressing sorrow at his death. Speaking at one of the meetings held in Calcutta in memory of Bankimcandra, Surendranath Banerjea said, “ So long as the Bengali language is spoken, so long as it is the language of our mothers, our wives, our daughters and sisters, so long as it continues to be the vehicle of the sweetest and tenderest affections and of the noblest and most generous impulses, so long as it is used as an instrument for purposes of edification, of instruction and amusement, so long will the name of Bunkim Chunder Chatterjee be remembered, honoured and respected.” ²

¹ The Statesman, 16th April, 1894

² The Bengalee, 12th May, 1894.

CHAPTER III

BANKIMCANDRA—THE WRITER

Bankimcandra served his early literary apprenticeship in the Bengali periodical, *Sambād Prabhākar*, edited by Išvarcandra Gupta, who was favourably impressed by Bankimcandra's writings.¹ Haraprasād Sāstrī, who as a young man knew Bankimcandra, wrote, "Išvara Gupta was so much charmed with his poetical and prose compositions that he often paid him a visit at Kantalpara. In after life Bankim Chandra used to relate to his friends the story of these visits with pride."² That Bankimcandra cherished for Išvarcandra Gupta a profound respect is seen from the preface he contributed to Išvarcandra's poems published in 1885-86. The *Sambād Prabhākar* encouraged young authors to write and a literary competition was one of its special features in 1853. Bankimcandra, Dīnabandhu Mitra and Dvārakānāth Adhikārī participated in the competition and all three received prizes.³

His first collected work, *Lalitā o Mānas*, was published in 1856. Išvarcandra Gupta reviewed it in

¹ *Sambād Prabhākar*, 25th February, 26th March, 28th May, 28th June, 1852, 5th February, 17th February, 30th March, 17th September, 1853, also 10th March and 23rd April, 10th July, 1852 and 10th January, 18th March and 27th April, 1853. About some of these contributions Išvar Gupta made favourable remarks.

² Calcutta University Magazine, May, 1894, p. 72.

³ *Sambād Prabhākar*, 17th June, 1853.

appreciative terms ¹ These poems were published again in 1878 and Bankimcandra wrote in the preface, "I do not cherish the hope of taking to myself any credit by showing in what manner I used to write in my youth, because most people at that age can write poetry of this type That which is unreadable, whether it is written by a boy or by an old man is equally to be discredited" He did not write much poetry in his more mature days except a few occasional pieces for *Bangadarśan* These were published as *Gadya Padya bā Kabitā Pustak*. The *Calcutta Review* said of it, "The poetry he has given us in the book under review deserves very high praise" ² But Bankimcandra's career as a poet was practically finished with his youthful experiments in the *Sambād Prabhākar*

What led him to write novels in Bengali he never made clear in any of his writings. Haraprasād Sāstrī says, "At College Bankim Chandra was a voracious reader of history, and he always longed to be a distinguished historian" ³ History might have attracted him to novel-writing He considered the novel to be a good vehicle for his ideas In one of his works he wrote, "Much of what I have to say has to be woven into the novel taking into consideration the time, place and theme" ⁴ In 1865 his first novel *Durgēśnandinī* was published, *Kapālkundalā* came in 1866, and *Mṛnālīnī* followed in 1869 He is said to have remarked that at this time his favourite occupation was

¹ *Sambād Prabhākar*, 28th July, 1856

² 1878, Notice of Vernacular Books

³ Bankim Jibānī p. 394

⁴ *Sitārām* These words were omitted in later editions

reading the works of Shakespeare.¹ The success of his first novels was immediate. Leading periodicals like *Sambād Prabhākar* and *Rahasya Sandarba* favourably reviewed it.² The *Sambād Prabhākar* published an address of appreciation presented to Bankimcandra by admiring readers of this novel³ That it was becoming a favourite with Bengali women is evident from some letters published in the same periodical.⁴

In 1872 Bankimcandra began to publish *Bangadarsan*, a periodical which soon became the ablest and most influential monthly magazine in Bengali in those days. The reason why he launched such a publication was fully explained in his introductory article in the first issue of *Bangadarsan*. In a letter to one of his friends written about the same time Bankimcandra said, "I have myself projected a Bengali Magazine with the object of making it the medium of communication and sympathy between the educated and the uneducated classes. You rightly say that the English for good or for evil has become our vernacular, and this tends daily to widen the gulf between the higher and lower ranks of Bengali society. This I think is not exactly what it ought to be, I think that we ought to disanglicise ourselves so to speak to the masses in the language which they understand"⁵ Yet he himself had once begun to write stories in English.

¹ Bankim Jibanī, p. 259, 3rd edition

² *Sambād Prabhākar*, 14th April, 1865, *Rahasya Sandarbha*, Pt XXI, pp. 140-44

³ 11th September, 1865

⁴ 2nd November, 1865

⁵ *Bengal Past and Present*, April-June, 1914, pp. 273-74.

The Adventures of a Young Hindu was his first effort in that line. But after completing another story, *Rajmohan's Wife*, he turned his mind to Bengali literature. Instead of being a second- or third-rate Bengali writer of English he became the greatest Bengali novelist.

The apathy that the educated community showed to Bengali language and literature in those days had been for some time alarming the thoughtful section of the public. The *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā* wrote, "Without the cultivation of the language of a country there can be no spread of knowledge nor any advancement of education."¹ The *Sambād Prabhākar* had deplored the indifference shown towards the study of Bengali.² Another periodical appealed to the people of Bengal to study Bengali.³ One journal wrote that without the patronage of the people themselves no language could prosper.⁴

In an atmosphere of indifference and callousness, Bankimcandra took the initiative in turning the attention of the educated Bengali public to the advancement of Bengali literature. From stories of gods and goddesses, from tales of mythology and legends of the past, from fantastical stories about ghosts and goblins, from the not-too-wholesome erotic songs and lyrics, he awakened the minds of men and women to the needs of the time, to concentrate their efforts on building an edifice of literature, dealing with the

¹ Series II, Pt II, p 179

² 5th April, 12th April, 1848

³ *Pūrṇimā*, Vol I, 1858, p 5

⁴ *Bangabidyāprakāśikā*, 1855-56, p 130.

best and noblest thoughts of the race, its highest aspirations and emotions, and its loftiest ideals.

What effect *Baṅgadarsan* made upon the contemporary Bengali public can well be understood from what Rabīndranāth Tagore writes about it, "Then came Bankim's *Baṅgadarsan*, taking the Bengali heart by storm. It was bad enough to have to wait till the next monthly number was out, but to be kept waiting further till my elders had done with it was simply intolerable ! Now he who will may swallow at a mouthful the whole of *Chandra-shekhar* or *Bishabriksha*, but the process of longing and anticipating, month after month , of spreading over the long intervals the concentrated joy of each short reading, revolving every instalment over and over in the mind while watching and waiting for the next , the combination of satisfaction with unsatisfied craving, of burning curiosity with its appeasement, these long-drawn-out delights of going through the original serial none will ever taste again."¹ Sir Praphullacandra Rāy writing about his younger days says " We were then ten or twelve years old. The taste for literary appreciation was not born in us. Still, we were eager for *Baṅgadarsan*. Dube, Chaube, Teoari with their bamboo-sticks, Lalchand Sing who danced playfully and was a voracious eater but quite worthless in his duties—these were very pleasing "² In Rabīndranāth's opinion Bankimcandra "invited both East and West to a veritable festival of union in the pages of his *Baṅgadarshan*."³

¹ My Reminiscences, p 115 ² Bhāratbarsa, Vol. XV, Pt II, p 69

³ Modern Review, June, 1921, p. 696

To *Bangadarśan*, Bankimcandra attracted a number of literary men. In its pages were published many of his own novels in succession—*Bisabrīkṣa*, *Indirā*, *Yugalāngurīya*, *Candraśekhara*, *Rajanī*. Besides these he contributed articles on various topics—literary criticism, satire, fine arts, ethics, religion, antiquities, sociology, history, philology, anthropology, politics, education, science, philosophy, etc. After four years *Bangadarsan* ceased publication. In wishing goodbye to the readers Bankimcandra wrote “Four years ago *Bangadarsan* began to be published. I had certain definite aims in view when I first started it. In the prefatory remarks I explained some of them, some were left unsaid. Much of what was said and unsaid has been fulfilled. Now there is no further need for the existence of *Bangadarśan*.”¹ Reviewing the last issue of *Bangadarśan* the *Calcutta Review* deplored its impending discontinuance.² Nabīncandra Sen has suggested that Bankimcandra stopped the publication of *Bangadarśan* because he made too many enemies by his strong criticism of literary upstarts.³ Buckland thought that the pressure of official duties led Bankimcandra to discontinue the publication of his journal.⁴ This seems to be the more probable explanation.

After two years his brother Sañjibcandra revived *Bangadarśan* and under his editorship it lived for some years. It was warmly welcomed and thought of as an

¹ Collected Works, Vol. III, p. 232 f.

² 1876, p. xxviii

³ *Amār Jiban*, Vol. II, p. 363

⁴ *Bengal under the Lt. Governor*, Vol. II, p. 1078

"excellent Bengali periodical"¹ In the second series of *Bangadarśan*, *Kṛṣṇakāntar* *En*, *Anandamath*, part of *Rājśinḥa*, and part of *Debī Caudhurānī* were published serially. Bankimcandra contributed to two other periodicals, *Pracār* and *Nabaḥan*, which were popular in their day. During the latter part of his life he became interested in religious matters and wrote several works on Hinduism—*Kṛṣṇacaritra*, *Dharmatattva* and some essays on the *Gītā*. But to think that his "later works were undertaken expressly in the interests of Hindu revival—a movement which received its strength and vitality from his adherence" would not be correct.² He had some sympathy for the Hindu revivalists but he did not adhere absolutely to their tenets and ideas. He was far too original-minded for that. Saśadhar Tarkacātāmānī's discourses on Hinduism drew the attention of many people to religion but Bankimcandra was not at all influenced by Saśadhar. Rabīndranāth testifies, "No shadow of Saśadhar was cast on his exposition of Hinduism as it found expression in the *Pracār*—that was impossible."³

Apart from his Bengali writings he wrote some valuable articles in English. His contribution on *Vedic Literature* appeared in the March and April issues of the *Calcutta University Magazine* in 1891. *The Confessions of Young Bengal* and the *Study of Hindu Philosophy* appeared in December, 1872, and May, 1873, respectively in *Mookerjee's Magazine*.

¹ Calcutta Review, 1877, p. v

² Calcutta University Magazine, May, 1894

³ My Reminiscences, p. 251

His articles on *Buddhism and Samkhya Philosophy* and *Bengali Literature* were published in 1871 in the *Calcutta Review*. In 1869 he read before the Bengal Social Science Association a paper, *On the Origin of Hindu Festivals*, which was published in the Transactions of the Association.¹ In 1870 he read before the same Association another paper, *A Popular Literature for Bengal*, which was also published in the Association's Transactions.² Some of these articles and papers have been translated into Bengali.³ He lived for fifty-six years only and wrote most of his works amidst official duties, which certainly were of an exacting nature. An active career full of hard work was perhaps responsible for his premature death.

Born in a family where literary taste was present in abundance, Bankimcandra was also fortunate in drawing round him a host of friends who actively co-operated with him in his literary enterprises. The first contributors to *Bangadarsan* were Dinabandhu Mitra, Hemcandra Bandyopādhyāya, Jagadīśnāth Rāy, Tārāprasād Cattopādhyāya, Kṛṣṇakamal Bhattācāryya, Rāmdās Sen and Aksaycandra Sarkār. The Bankim circle also included men of letters like Candranāth Basu, Rājkrishna Mukhopādhyāya, Kṛṣṇabihārī Sen, Nilkantha Majumdār, Dāmodar Mukhopādhyāya, Indranāth Bandyopādhyāya, Kaliprasanna Ghos, Gobindacandra Dās, etc. His brothers Sañjibcandra and Purnacandra were able writers. Sañjibcandra's novels

¹ Vol. III

² Vol. IV

³ *Sāhitya, Kirtan*, 1319, *Agrahayan*, 1323, *Jyaishta*, 1320, *Māgh-Pūṅgun*, 1323, and *Barāh-Jyaishta*, 1324 B. Y.

Mādhavīlatā and *Kanthamālā* are well-known. Pūrṇacandra wrote a novel *Swapnasahacarī*.

It is easily understood from the dedication of his works with what friendliness Bankimcandra regarded his literary brethren. They belonged to an intellectual fraternity. *Durgeśnandinī* was dedicated to his brother Śyāmācaraṇ, *Mṛnālīnī* to Dīnabandhu Mitra whom Bankimcandra styled "Banga-Kabi-Kula-Tīlak," *Sitārām* to the memory of Rājkr̥ṣṇa Mukhopādhyāya, *Bisabr̥kṣa* to Jagadīśnāth Rāy, *Kapālkundalā* to Sañjibcandra, *Candraśekhara* to Pūṇacandra. To Dr Rāmdās Sen with whom Bankimcandra first discussed the plan of starting *Bangadarśan* he dedicated *Kamalākānter Daptar*.¹ Bankimcandra invited Nabīncandra Sen to write for *Bangadarśan* and advised him to publish *Palāsīr Yuddha*.² Nabīncandra's poem *Abakāśrañjīnī* was reviewed by Bankimcandra in *Bangadarśan*.³ Nabīncandra dedicated *Rangamatī* to Bankimcandra. Between the two a great intimacy grew up and Bankimcandra began to address Nabīncandra affectionately as "grandson".⁴ They met at the time of the Exhibition held in Calcutta in 1883 and Nabīncandra was impressed by Bankimcandra's sense of humour.⁵

Although Bankimcandra was strict as an official, to his friends he was very affectionate and affable. Dīnabandhu and Bankimcandra often spent pleasant hours in each other's company. To the collected works

¹ Nikhīlnāth Rāy, Dāktār Rāmdās Sen

² *Āmār Jīban*, Vol II, pp 225-26

³ *Bibidha Prabandha*, Gītī Kābya,

⁴ *Āmār Jīban*, Vol IV, pp. 275-76

⁵ *Ibid*, Vol III, pp 484-35

of Dinabandhu published in 1877 Bankimcandra contributed an introduction as a mark of his deep regard. Among his European friends H. A. D. Phillips of the Indian Civil Service and C. E. Buckland deserve special mention. H. A. D. Phillips translated *Kapālkundalā* into English and Buckland paid a warm tribute to Bankimcandra in his book, *Bengal under the Lieutenant Governors*.

Bankimcandra began to write in Bengali at a time when it was regarded as beneath the dignity of an educated man to do so. The language of the educated class was English and aspirant after aspirant sought fame with compositions in that language.¹ Bankimcandra not only wrote himself in Bengali but advised others to do so. When Ramescandra Datta urged his ignorance of Bengali style, Bankimcandra told him that whatever an educated man like him wrote would be style and taking that hint Ramescandra became a distinguished Bengali writer.² Bankimcandra was not content with being a writer himself. He liked others to write and generously encouraged them. Rabīndranāth has recorded how at the wedding of Ramescandra Datta's daughter Bankimcandra garlanded him and praised his *Evening Songs* and the manner in which he did it amply rewarded the poet who was then young.³

¹ See T. O. D. Dunn's *Bengali Book of English Verse*, India in Song, Bengali Writers of English Verse.

² R. C. Dutt, *Literature of Bengal*, pp. 225-26.

³ *My Reminiscences*, pp. 213-14.

CHAPTER IV

DURGĀKANDĪ

Plot

Tilottamā, daughter of Birendra Sinha, chieftain of Māndārān in Bengal, went to the temple of Saileśvar with Bimalā, who was really Birendra's wife but lived in his house incognito as a maid-servant. To that place driven by storm came Jagat Sinha, son of Rājā Mān Sinha, the Rājput General of the Emperor Akbar. Jagat and Tilottamā fell in love with each other at first sight. Bimalā coming to know who he was asked him to meet her again at the temple after a fortnight. On the appointed day she came there and admitted him to Birendra's fortress by a secret passage to meet Tilottamā. The Mughals and the Pāthāns (known also as Afghāns) were engaged at that time in fighting one another. Mān Sinha had come to Bengal to subdue Katalu Khān, the Pāthan Sultan. Birendra sided with the Mughals. Through the door left open through mistake by Bimalā, the Pāthan General, Osmān entered the castle with his soldiers and captured Birendra, Bimalā and Tilottamā. Jagat severely wounded after a hard struggle, fell into the hands of the Pāthāns unconscious. Katalu Khān's daughter Āyesā nursed Jagat and fell in love with him. Birendra was beheaded under Katalu's orders as a rebel. Bimalā vowed vengeance. Tilottamā came to see Jagat in the prison but was rudely repulsed as he had doubts

of her character since she had been living in the palace of Katalu. Āyesā's hidden love for Jagat was one day revealed to him when she was taunted by Osmān, who regarded Jagat as his rival for her love. On a festive occasion in the palace Bimalā killed Katalu and fled with Tilottamā. They took shelter with Bīrendra's spiritual preceptor Abhirām Svāmī. On his death-bed Katalu Khān prayed for peace and vouched for Tilottamā's character. Since her rebuff by Jagat, Tilottamā had been lying seriously ill and he went to see her as desired by Abhirām. When she recovered they were married. Āyesā came on the marriage-day bringing valuable presents for the bride. On her return to her father's palace she threw away the diamond ring by sucking which she had once thought of killing herself.

Durgeśnandinī was published in 1865. Critics have been unanimous in their opinion that Bankimcandra's model was evidently European fiction. Rāmgatī Nyāyaratna said, "Sanskrit literature was not the model of Bankim Babu's story. His model was English literature"¹ He further remarked, "The new note which marks its style is not seen in any Bengali work of an earlier date"² Western critics of Bankimcandra's novels assign it to the influence of Scott.³ Bankimcandra is reported to have said that he had not read Scott's *Ivanhoe* before he wrote *Durgeśnandinī*.⁴ Whether he had read it or not, the resemblance between Rebecca in *Ivanhoe* and Āyesā in *Durgeśnandinī*

¹ Bīṅgālā Bhāṣā o Bāṅgālī Sāhitya, p. 321

² *Ibid.*, p. 321.

³ Buckland, Bengal under the Lt. Governors, Vol. II, p. 1078

⁴ Bankim Jibinī, p. 142

is striking in some respects. But in spite of some similarity between the two characters, Bankimcandra's originality does not suffer to any great extent. Professor Cowell says, "It is far from being a mere servile copy"¹ That the work was something perfectly new was felt even in Bankimcandra's own day.²

On the title page of some of the later editions of *Durgeshnandinī*, the work is described as "*itibrittamālak upanyās*," which means a novel based on history³ It is interesting to note here that Dāmodar Mukhopādhyāya wrote a sequel to this novel, *Nabābnandinī* which, however, is marred by its distortion of the events narrated by Bankimcandra

The two principal male characters in the novel are Jagat Simha and Osmān Both are born fighters, both are chivalrous, but while Osmān's attitude to the Rājput prince was actuated by policy and expediency, the prince had nothing but gratitude for the man who had saved his life Osmān became terribly jealous when Āyesā declared her love for the prince In such a declaration of love some writers have scented Bankimcandra's anti-Muslim spirit.⁴ But they conveniently forget that this great writer though he deeply loved his own race and religion was not in the least prejudiced against people of other faiths⁵ Writing as a novelist he thought it his duty to make no distinction

¹ Macmillan's Magazine, 1871-72, p. 460

² H. C. Rakṣit, *Baṅgasāhitye Bankim*, p. 52

³ 4th Edition (1871), 5th Edition (1874), 7th Edition (1879), 9th Edition (1882)

⁴ *Bhāratī*, Vol. XXVII, pp. 29-30

⁵ *Baṅgabānī*, *Baṅsākh*, 1830 B. Y., p. 387.

whatsoever between one community and another. If he had in the least been inclined to show the Muslim community at a disadvantage, he would never have delineated such lovable women as Āyesā and Dalanī Begam.

For Osmān one feels sympathy. A brave man, a capable general, a faithful officer, in affairs of the heart he was unfortunate. The Osmān of actual history was a brave warrior. When the Mughals defeated the Pāthāns of Bengal in 1612, Osmān died after a hard day's fight rather than surrender to the Mughals.¹ There is a difference of opinion among historians regarding his paternity. Some say that he was the son of Katalu Khān, others say that he was the son of Isa Khān Lohani.²

Jagat Simha's part in the plot is not that of a mere spectator as Henry Morton's is in Scott's *Old Mortality*. He is actually concerned in the central episodes of the story. He is a faithful representation of the typical Rājput soldier who lived only for his honour. When he knew that he could not marry Tilottamā on account of her father's scruples, he did not, like many other disappointed lovers, look upon life as a burden. He sought solace in his duties as a soldier. There is, however, something unnatural and unbecoming in his entrance into the castle clandestinely. That was against all canons of gentlemanly conduct. This seems to be the only drawback in his character. When he was misinformed that Tilottamā was in the

¹ Vincent Smith, *Oxford History of India*, p. 380

² Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 237, Rivazu-s-Salatin, English Translation, p. 178

understand the world and bestow her love on a worthy person Osmān had fruitlessly wooed her for years. The very fact that they had known each other for years stood in the way of any romantic attachment that she might have felt for him. The prince came as a surprise to her life. He was like some one from a book of romance and he easily captivated her imagination. As through the long days of his illness she nursed him with the devotion of a loving woman, she became enamoured of him. Still, she tried her best to conceal her love knowing that it was hopeless. Not only did they belong to different religions, but Jagat loved another. But these facts had nothing to do with her love. She loved him careless of all hope of return. She completely controlled her feelings, but in the prison-house, when Osmān taunted her, she gave way and her pent-up feelings found bold expression.¹ The letter that she wrote to Jagat was no ordinary love-letter "I do not crave for your love," she wrote, "what I had to give, I have given you freely. I do not ask for any return. My affection is so deeply rooted that I am happy even without your love."² It was no wonder that Jagat thought of her as "the glory of the fair sex"³

There is another woman in the story who deserves notice. Critics have found more than one fault in Bankimcandra's delineation of Bimalā's character. One critic says that in her character there are occasional traces of humour of a low type.⁴ Considering the difficult

¹ Durgeśnandinī, Pt II, Ch XV

² *Ibid*, Pt II, Ch XIX

³ *Ibid*

Griyāprasanna Rāycaudhuri, Bankimcandra, Pt II, p 5

situations she had sometimes to refer to her. If from she had to stoop to certain things and do under the circumstances. The small human factor in her character is on the surface only. Although she is made for the job she enjoyed at the expense of Gayatri Vidyādēyī. I believe in her as probably thinking of the royal letter in the dream of Tulodhī and other Sen Era writer in time for of paper. In Mādhabāya and Bāndarī, where she is a "dancer" and her mind Anānī play that upon Gayatri. Another critic has found fault with the description of Bāndarī busy with her toilet. This is rather true. It was certainly improper as well as undignified for her to admit a stranger within the inner apartment of the palace. But even in this she is motivated by an unselfish desire to make Tulodhī happy. She did not foresee the consequences. After she had avenged herself for Bāndarī's death she became the ghost of her former self and was quietly removed from the final scene by the author. She was no longer necessary.

Abhirām Svāmī marks the beginning of the series of Bankimcandra's "Sannyāsi" character. He belongs to the same class as Rāmānand Svāmī in *Candraśekhara*, Mādhabācārya in *Urulini* and Candracīn in *Sitārām*. These men were skilled in religious and temporal matters. They embodied the ancient Hindu ideals of the "Guru" who advised his disciples on both spiritual and worldly affairs. Not living in the forest-hermitages, they knew the ways of the

world, yet they could keep themselves aloof and detached.

The humour of Bengali writers before Bankimcandra was marked by vulgarity and bad taste. Even Bankimcandra's friend Dīnabandhu Mitra was not free from this fault. But Bankimcandra's picture of the dull and comical Gajapati was something new. Gajapati was a disciple of Abhirām. Though a Brāhman, he could learn nothing, and was devoid even of common sense. A coward who thought himself a gallant, he was a butt of the ridicule of Bimalā and Āsmānī. He is a type of the foolish hangers-on of rich people and reminds one of the Vidusaka in Sanskrit dramas on whom he is a distinct improvement. The reason for introducing him into the novel seems to have been a desire to relieve the serious element in the story. Bankimcandra made fun of the traditional "panditmūrkhā". With his ludicrous appearance, stale humour and timid ways Vidyādiggaḥ is more to be pitied than laughed at. The description of Āsmānī's beauty is a marvellous piece of humour.¹ It shows how humour can be clothed in beautiful and elegant language preserving at the same time the lighter tone. Āsmānī's love-making is audacious and she goes a bit too far with her practical jokes. In his description of Āsmānī's beauty Bankimcandra is ridiculing hyperbolical writers in Sanskrit and Bengali.

The central story in *Durgeśnandinī* is not a pure figment of imagination. It was a traditional story in

¹ *Durgeśnandinī*, Pt. I, Ch. XII

Jāhānābād.¹ But Bankimcandra linked up many imaginary incidents with it. The main outlines of the Mughal attempts to subdue the Pāthāns in Bengal are correct. To suit his own convenience the author made changes in details. The Mughal invasions of Bengal began long before Mān Simha was sent as Viceroy. Before him Munim Khān, Raja Todar Mal and Azim Khān came as Governors of the province, but the skirmishes between the Mughals and the Pāthāns never ceased during the period. In one history of the time we find that Mān Simha was appointed Governor of Bengal on the accession of the Emperor Jahāngīr and was recalled after eight months.² Stewart says that Jagat Simha was taken prisoner by artifices and Katalu Khān really died a natural death. After his death Jagat was released and through him the Pāthāns sued for peace, as a result of which the young sons of Katalu visited Man Simha and agreed to obey the Emperor as overlord.³ Bankimcandra could have been more charitable to Katalu Khān. But a storyteller needs a villain for his own purposes and hence the Pāthān Sultan is depicted as a vile and vicious monarch.

The novel takes the reader to the days of Pāthān rule in Bengal. Was there any particular reason why Bankimcandra chose this period of history as the background of his first novel? Professor Cowell thinks that the author placed the story in the times of Akbar

¹ Rahasya Sandarbha, Pt XXI, p 140

² Riyazu-s-Salatīn, p 168

³ Stewart, History of Bengal, pp 208-09, Elphinstone, History of India, p 500.

as that ruler had left such a deep mark on the Hindu mind¹ It might have been Bankimcandra's sympathy for the Pāthāns of Bengal that led him to picture a time when they challenged the supremacy of the Mughals. Moreover in some accounts of this period the Pāthān rebellion was not impartially treated as the sympathy of the historians was with the Mughals.² Writing long after, even a modern historian like Vincent Smith remarks about the end of the independent Kingdom of Bengal, "Its disappearance need not excite the slightest feeling of regret. The Kings, mostly of Afghan origin, were mere military adventurers, lording it over a submissive Hindu population, the very existence of which is ignored by history"³ Bankimcandra introduced the Pāthāns in a more favourable light than they had been placed hitherto. He thought that the ancient traditions and high spirit of the Pāthāns would not only be a subject worthy of a novel, but it would also go a long way towards vindicating those virtues of the Pāthāns that had received scant justice at the hands of historians

¹ Macmillan's Magazine, 1871 72, p 455

² In Riyazu s-Salatīn, p 175, one of the bravest Pāthān Generals is called "that wretched man." For the Afghān insurrections, see Briggs, Ferishta, Vol. II

³ V A Smith, Akbar the Great Mogul, p 146

CHAPTER V

कौशिकस्य

Plot

A young man Nabakumār, who returned from Gangāśān was left by accident in the jungle by his companions and met a Tiger. Kāpālk had brought up a maiden Kapālkundalā, who saved Nabakumār's life from being lost to the hands of her foster-father and brought him to the temple of Bhobām at Hiji where they were married by the temple-priest. On the way to his own home Nabakumār met a Muslim woman Matī Bibī. She was really Padmāvatī, his first wife, who had been discarded by him in early youth as her parent had embraced the faith of Islam. She recognised her husband but did not make herself known to him. From that day she desired to be re-united to him. Nabakumār came to Saptagrām with Kapālkundalā and began to live there. Thither came also Matī Bibī after a year, being baffled in her intrigues in Agra and Delhi, and begged for her husband's love, which, of course, he refused. Her next aim was to bring about the separation of Nabakumār and Kapālkundalā. One night Naba saw his wife going to the forest alone and, following her, saw her speaking to an unknown man really no other than Matī Bibī in disguise, who had decoyed Kapālkundalā there. The Kāpālk was also in league with Matī Bibī. He had come to Saptagram to wreak vengeance on Kapālkundalā because she had

foiled his intention of offering Nabakumār as a human sacrifice to Kālī. He met Naba in the jungle and made him believe that his wife was unfaithful to him. Under the Kāpālik's malignant influence Nabakumār agreed to punish his wife by offering her as a sacrifice before the goddess Bhabānī. Kapālkundala was led to the banks of the Ganges to be sacrificed. In the course of conversation with her Naba came to know that she was innocent of any infidelity to him. While they were talking, a huge wave dashed against the bank and Kapālkundalā fell into the waters. Nabakumār jumped down to rescue her, but neither of them was seen again.

It should be mentioned here that in the first edition of *Kapālkundalā*, the heroine was accidentally drowned in the river and Nabakumār, who jumped after her was rescued by the Kāpālik. In later editions the story is in its present form.

Kapālkundalā was published in 1866.¹ It was at Nagoya or Negua (now known as Contai in the Midnapore district) that Bankimcandra met the Kāpālik, who was his model for that important character in *Kapālkundalā*. Dariapur, Daulatpur and Rasulpur are villages in Midnapore and the natural scenery of these places was the background of this novel. The people of Midnapore encouraged by the

¹ Kṛṣṇadās Pāl was writing in 1870 to Dr. Sambhu Chandra Mookerjee to review *Kapālkundalā* in the *Hindu Patriot*, which Dr. Mookerjee did (*Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. IX, July-December, 1914, p. 145). This review then must have been of the second edition which was published in 1869 or 1870 and certainly proves that the Calcutta Review was not correct in its opinion that *Kapālkundalā* was unpopular (*Calcutta Review*, 1873, 1876, *Notices of Vernacular Books*).

interest shown by an English member of the Indian Civil Service set up some years ago a tablet in the courtyard of the old temple at Dariapur to commemorate Bankimcandra's conception of *Kapālkundalā*.¹

Dāmodar Mukhopādhyāya's *Mṛṇmayī* (1874), written as a sequel to *Kapālkundalā*, was published with Bankimcandra's permission. It is a pity that a writer inferior in merit to Bankimcandra should have been allowed to distort his story and spoil much of its beauty. But as Dāmodar was related to him, Bankimcandra perhaps felt it impossible to object.

The subject-matter of *Kapālkundalā* is not historical. Though the book contains references to historical events and characters, the novelist is more engaged with the feelings and sentiments that rise in the human heart—the chords of passion that are struck in human nature in conflict with circumstances. In a romantic atmosphere, on the brink of the sea, Nabakumār met a divinely beautiful woman. It was a dramatic meeting. But it was not love at first sight. The background of the story is romantic and picturesque. There is even something strange and weird in it. The providential meeting of these two people was followed by fateful events. The belief in destiny is again and again stressed by Bankimcandra in this novel, but to trace it to the influence of Greek fatalism as some critics do is not quite correct.² The Hindu like the Greek was equally prone to attribute the course of his life to the influence of destiny or fate. It was nothing new that Bankimcandra was propounding. He was merely

¹ Bhāratbarā, Vol XI, Pt I, p 37.

² P C Basu, *Kābyasundarī*, p 89

voicing the belief shared by hundreds and thousands of people in India

Stolen early in infancy by Portuguese pirates and left on the seashore, Kapālkundalā was brought up in a lonely place ¹ The only other human being she knew was the Kāpālik who had brought her up with a view to fulfil his own foul ends when she was of age The Kāpālik was the follower of a creed which paid "little heed to the orthodox view advocating the necessity of restraining the senses for spiritual advancement" ² Sexual relationship with woman was part of his religious worship ³ But Kapālkundalā knew nothing of this, nor anything of the world. She was living far away from other people and had not the slightest knowledge of the outside world

When she was married she could not adapt herself to a life which restrained her freedom She had not even any idea of the meaning of marriage ⁴ The premonition that her marriage would end in disaster came to her mind again and again ⁵ More than once she had visions of supernatural beings Once she dreamt of an overturned boat and herself drowned ⁶ On the fateful night of her death she saw the awe-inspiring shape of the goddess Kālī in the sky.

¹ The Portuguese pirates of Chittagong were in the habit of raiding parts of Bengal, capturing people and selling them as slaves —Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, pp 175-76

² M. M. Bose, *The Post-Caitanya Sahajā Cult of Bengal*, p 120

³ *Journal of the Department of Letters, Calcutta University*, 1927, Vol. XVI, p 27

⁴ Kapālkundalā, Pt I, Ch VIII

⁵ Kapālkundalā, Part I, Ch IX, Pt II, Ch VI

⁶ *Ibid*, Pt IV, Ch III

Yet Kapālakundalā was affectionate and ready to help others. She readily offered to help her sister-in-law Syāmāsundarī in getting some herbs which were supposed to bring her her husband's love.

In Kapālkundalā's life love had no great influence.¹ There was no outward manifestation of it, but she was not devoid of those finer instincts which characterise women. Bankimchandra has shown Kapālkundalā in several stages of her life. At first she was the virgin in the wild forests. Then she was married but her entry into the world did not make any great change in her character. In her heart, she was the same innocent maiden, longing for the woods, where she felt quite at home. She could not bear the glare of the world and it killed her. Many Bengali writers are fond of comparing her with Śakuntalā and Miranda. The comparison has become rather hackneyed. Śakuntalā and Miranda both knew something of the world. Śakuntalā had companions and guardians in the hermitage. Miranda had her father. But Kapālkundalā's character was wholly formed by the lovely forests amidst which she had grown up. From the great deep she came and to the great deep she went.

Matī Bibī, Padmābatī, or Lutphunnesā (she was known by all these names) was an intelligent and self-assertive woman, but quite lacking in self-restraint. Ambition ruled her heart and she had no moral scruples. To her over-sexed nature Nabakumār appealed as another victim to be sacrificed. Still, the

¹ *Ibid*, Pt IV, Ob VIII.

meeting with her husband partially changed her life. Her vanity was mortally wounded when she saw Kapālakundalā's beauty. She was too selfish and thought of captivating Nabakumār by her beauty. As the fascination which she felt for her husband had not its basis in real love she planned to have him by any means—fair or foul. Her offers were met with cold refusal. Her passion had germinated rather abruptly, it stupefied her and she lost her balance. As a dramatic finish to a passionate scene she proudly said to Nabakumār, "Never in this life shall I give up hope of you" ¹. It had dawned upon her late in life that happiness could be found in ordinary ways of life, that without love life was nothing to a woman. But it was too late. She had revelled too long in the enjoyment of the senses. She had never known the discipline of life. Once only her better nature asserted itself when she warned Kapālkundalā of the Kāpālīk's murderous intentions ². The importance of her character lies in its value as a contrast enhancing the gracefulness of Kapālkundalā. In many of Bankimcandra's novels there are similar contrasted pairs of characters, e.g., in *Candraśekhhar* there are Dalanī and Saibahnī, Foster and Takī Khān, Mīr Kāsīm and Candraśekhhar.

The feminine element predominates in this novel and Nabakumār is a rather unconvincing and undeveloped character. He is too lopsided. His marriage with Kapālkundalā was a sudden affair and he readily believed the Kāpālīk's tale of her infidelity.

¹ Kapālkundalā, Pt III, Ch VI

² *Ibid.*, Pt IV, Ch VII

to him. In spite of his being a man of impulses, there was considerable generosity in his nature. He loved his wife. Like Othello he never had thought of clearing up the mystery, but harboured unfounded suspicions against Kapālkunḍalā. One of the redeeming features in his character is his stern moral code which made it possible for him to rise above the temptations held out by Matī Bibī. The Brāhman decided to remain poor rather than become the paramour of a woman whom he regarded as an infidel.

In this novel Bankimcandra made a mild hit at Kulīnism which was a disgraceful social scandal in his days and which had as its victims thousands of women in Bengal. In the periodical press of the previous decade Kulīnism had been pilloried.¹ Rāmnārāyan Taikaratna had condemned it in his play, *Kulīnakulasarvasva*. Dīnabandhu Mitra's drama, *Jāmūi Bārik*, gives a realistic glimpse of the humorous aspects of this social evil. In 1856 the movement against Kulīn polygamy was started and it went on for twenty years. Ten years later a petition signed by twenty-one thousand people was submitted to Sir Cecil Beadon, then Lieut.-Governor of Bengal, praying for legal measures for the suppression of Kulīnism.² Pandit Isvarcandra Vidyāsāgar denounced Kulīn polygamy in *Bahubibāha*. Bankimcandra could not escape the influence of the time. In an essay on this subject originally published in *Bangadarśan*, he condemned polygamy although

¹ *Dharmarāj*, 1852-53, Vol. I, Pts. 3, 4, 6, 7; *Kalikāta Patrikā*, 1858, *Paridarśak*, 18th December, 1861.

² *Gandīcaran Bandyopādhyāya*, *Vidyāsāgar*, pp. 327-29.

differing from Vidyāsāgar on certain points.¹ The Press in subsequent years did not cease to write against Kulīnism² The intensity of public indignation against it can easily be understood by a glance at the number of books and tracts that were written on the subject by both men and women writers³

The Tāntrik Kāpālik's misguided religious zeal and abominable rites of worship are so vividly drawn by Bankimcandra obviously with the intention of exposing the hideousness of Tāntrik practices. Bankimcandra's description of the Kāpālik corresponds with the customary description of the Tāntrik worshipper—ashes on the body, a garland of human heads round the neck, collyrium in his eyes, knotted hair, a garment of tiger-skin, a girdle, a human skull in his hand.⁴ The Kāpālik resembles other specimens of the same type in Indian literature⁵

Regarding Tāntrikism and Bankimcandra's attitude towards it nothing would be a better commentary than what Rev K M Banerjea once wrote, "The best practical expose of the illicit union is contained in that great Bengali romance, the Kapalkundala. The great Tāntric hero of that inimitable novel is Kapālika, a representative worshipper of Bhabanī and Bhairavī,

¹ Bibidha Prabandha, P. II.

² Sulabh Samājār 1870-71, p. 101

³ Kulīn Kāvya (1874), Kulīn Bāha (1882), Kulīnharan (1874), Kulkālma (1873), Kaulīya-Samsodhānī (1871), Kulrahasya Kāvya (1877), Ballālī-Samsodhānī (1878), Cittaśulāsa nī (1857)

⁴ Tattvabodhinī Part II, P. IV, p. 329

⁵ Acherachanta in Māla-mūdhaka, Act V, Samsodhānī in Panchendrasava, Act III, Parashurama in Karpūramānārī, Act I

as personations of Sakti or Prakṛiti. This man is described as an eremite far from towns and villages, adopting and fostering foundling girls, and waylaying and decoying benighted young men, only to sacrifice them before the shrine of his goddess, because the Tantric cannot accomplish his worship without human flesh, and because without violating the chastity of women, the Tantric cannot attain perfection. Those allegations in the *Kapalkundalā* are fully justified by passages contained in the *Tantras*''¹

Many years after this novel had been written, Bankimcandra said about Tāntrikism, "I have in no respect departed from the view I put forward and illustrated in *Kapalkundalā* in regard to the morality of that form of Hinduism. True Hinduism and Tāntrikism are as opposed to each other as light and darknesslet it never be assumed that Tantrikism is the general religion of the Hindus, no one, I believe, has ever thought of making such an assumption''²

In recent times attempts have been made to represent the *Tantras* in a less revolting light. Sir John Woodroffe says, "The *Tantra Shāstra* stands for a principle of high value though, like things admittedly good, it is capable of, and has suffered, abuse''³ To what extent Tāntrikism had degenerated in the earlier part of the nineteenth century can best be understood if one glances even casually over the pages of some of the Calcutta periodicals, which led a crusade against all

¹ *Statesman*, 14th November, 1882

² *Statesman*, 22nd November, 1882

³ *Shakti and Shakta*, p. 31

kinds of undesirable elements, in moral and social life ¹ It is true that Tantrikism was a powerful influence in its flourishing days Bankimcandra was fully conscious of the influence it exerted upon Vaisnavism ² But what he thought of it in its degenerate stage is fully illustrated in *Kapālkundalā* and there is not the least doubt that he condemned such religious malpractices as the Kāpālik indulged in

As an attempt at a picture of life in Bengal more than three hundred years ago, *Kapālkundalā* is interesting It not only gives an insight into Bengali domestic life as it was in times gone by, but affords a glimpse into the affairs of the imperial court of Delhi, far from the scene of its main activities This novel is a remarkable study in contrasts With the quiet and peaceful life of a Bengali in Saptagram are contrasted the conspiracies and counter-conspiracies in Delhi and Agra, in which Padmābatī participated There is Kapālkundalā who was brought up in the forests knowing nothing of the world, and there is Matī Bibī, who had already seen too much of the shady side of life There is the gay life of the court in Delhi on the one hand and, on the other, there is the simple life of Nabakumār in his home Last of all there is that vast loneliness of the forests which looms large in the background of the story, and stands in marked contrast both to the splendour of Delhi and to the rural environments of Saptagram.

¹ *Tattvalobdhini Patrikā*, Pt IV, Series I, No 11

² *Kṛṣṇacintā*, Pt II, Ch X

CHAPTER VI

MRNĀLINĪ

Plot

Hemcandra, prince of Magadha, was secretly married to Mināhuī, daughter of a merchant of Mathurā. Bakhtyar Khaljī had recently taken possession of Magadha and was threatening Bengal. Mādhābācārya, Hemcandra's preceptor, thinking that Minālinī was an obstacle to Hemcandra's career had her brought by stratagem to the house of his disciple, Hrsīkeś Śarmā, at Laksmanābatī (Gau) Hemcandra employed a beggar-girl, Girijāyā, to trace his wife and she succeeded in finding her. But in the meantime, Hemcandra had to leave for the court of Laksman Sen at Nabadvīp, to fulfil a promise made by Mādhābācārya, to render help to Laksman Sen in dealing with the threat of a Muhammadan invasion. Laksman's chief officer, Paśupati, was in league with the Muslims and had tutored the court-pandits to declare that Bengal was fated to be conquered by the Muslims. Paśupati resented the arrival of Hemcandra at Nabadvīp and made an unsuccessful attempt upon his life. After he was wounded Hemcandra was nursed by Manoramā, the adopted daughter of a disciple of Mādhābācārya. Manoramā was generally supposed to be a widow, but had really been married as a child to Paśupati and she herself knew that he was her husband, though he did not know who she was and had in the meantime fallen

in love with her. Minālinī in order to preserve her good name felt compelled to leave the house of Hīśikeś and came with Girijāyā to Nabadvīp. Mādhavācārya told Hemcandra that Minālinī had been turned out by Hīśikeś for her misconduct. So when they met he left her in rage and disgust. The Muslims entered Nabadvīp without any opposition. Paśupati's house was set on fire and when he entered it to find Manoramā, whom he had locked in there intending to marry her, the house fell down and he was killed. Manoramā had in the meantime escaped. Byomkeś, Hīśikeś's son, cleared Minālinī's character. Manoramā died on Paśupati's funeral pyre. With the wealth left by her to Hemcandra, he founded a kingdom in the south and lived happily with Minālinī. Girijāyā married Hemcandra's attendant Digbijay.

Mrnālinī, described by the author himself on the title-page of the first edition as "aitibāsik upanyās," was published in 1869. *Hemcandra* by Surendramohan Bhattācāryya, a sequel to *Mrnālinī*, was published in 1905. The atmosphere of the original novel is present in it, but it lacks in artistic development.

The action of *Mrnālinī* takes place in the period of the Muslim conquest of Bengal and the decay of the Hindu power. The decrepit old king Lakṣman Sen was thinking more of his approaching death than of resisting the Muslim invaders. His Brāhman advisers were in the pay of his enemies and their explanation that such a happening was foretold in the holy books satisfied the aged monarch.¹

¹ Tabakat-i-Nasiri, pp. 505-57, Cambridge History of India, Vol. III, p. 46. "The predations, as recorded by Muslim historians, were

Bankimcandra regarded the story of the conquest of Bengal by Bakhtyar Khalji and his few horsemen as an untrustworthy myth.¹ In this novel he looked at history from the point of view of an impartial observer. History had to be written anew and as a student of facts, Bankimcandra could not accept without challenge the garbled version that unreliable historians offered.

In his own novels he has not been very strict about historical accuracy, but the fundamental facts of history and historical fiction are two quite different things. Whenever he has been at variance with history, it has been in minor details. To the broader issues of history he has been true. To one of his friends, Bankimcandra wrote, "I have advised you to keep clear of history, but I cannot advise you to run counter to history. Even this you may do so far as individual characters are concerned, but I am hardly bold enough to advise you to do so in the case of large national movements."²

Here, at least, his contentions have been borne out by modern researches. The original account given in the *Tabakat-i-Nasiri* is an exaggeration of facts either of the historian himself or his informants.³ The *Riyazu-s-salat* gives an almost similar account of the conquest of Bengal by Muhammad Bakhtyar Khalji.⁴

strangely minute in matters of detail, but these historians wrote after the event, and the original texts which they cite cannot be traced."

¹ *Mṛnālinī*, Pt. IV, Chs. IV, V, Collected Works, Vol. II, p. 632

² N. C. Sen, *Āmār Jiban*, Vol. IV, p. 126

³ *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, pp. 557-58, *Indian Historical Quarterly*, 1927, p. 127.

⁴ Pp. 62-63

The *Cambridge History of India* says, " Some suspicion rests on details of this account which is drawn from Muslim sources " ¹ It was not Bakhtyar who captured Nadiā and expelled Laksman Sen but Muhammad Khalji, son of Bakhtyar ² H G Raverty, the translator of *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, says that in the more recent copies of the text, the word " son of " has been left out and thus with European and some local Indian Muhammadan historians, the father has had the credit for what the son performed ³ Recently it has been doubted whether this Laksman Sen was really king of Bengal at that time ⁴ Bankimcandra cannot be blamed for confusing Bakhtyar with his son as the former was for years regarded as the first Muslim invader of Bengal

Though *Mrnālinī* has an historical background, the principal characters are purely imaginary The dream of a Hindu empire in Magadha was gone for ever, but some hope still lurked in the heart of Mādhavācārya, one of those visionary characters who figure somewhat prominently in the novels of Bankimcandra Hemcandra, prince of Magadha, was chosen to build up a new kingdom He is a brave and patriotic young man. With him Bankimcandra introduced a series of characters which stand for Hindu supremacy and domination. Hemcandra's manliness is marred to

¹ Vol III, p 46

² Smith, Oxford History of India, p 221, Imperial Gazetteer of India Vol XVII, p 76, Bengal District Gazetteer (India), pp 23-25

³ *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, p 548

⁴ Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, January, 1930 Article on "Chronology of the Sena Kings of Bengal" The writer says that Laksman died long before the Muslim invasion of Bengal

some extent by his sudden fits of anger and incredulity. At times he is rough and overbearing.¹ He lacks the princely grace and courtesy of Jagat Simha and is more of the rough and ready soldier. He readily believed the story of Mr̥nālinī's unfaithfulness. He generously offered his services to the aged king Lakṣman Sen. When the Muslims sacked Nabadvīp, he helped the citizens in their distress as far as possible.

The mainspring of Mr̥nālinī's character was her deep love for Hemcandra. Nothing could shake the foundations of that love and her faith in him. Even when it was suggested that Hemcandra was in love with another, she was quite sure that he belonged to her and her only. She never murmured, she never argued or complained of her cruel treatment by Hemcandra. It was because she was perfectly sure of her love that through suffering she passed unscathed without any bitterness or resentment towards Hemcandra. Even when she was harshly treated, her only anxiety was for his safety.²

Manoramā is a sort of a riddle. At times she would be very grave and serious and at others playful. She is a complex character and her discourse on love shows the reflective element in her nature.³ Yet, her love like herself was enigmatical. Did she really love Paśupati? He was her husband and she must have felt some kind of attachment for him, but one is not sure how much she loved him. She prized virtue

¹ Mr̥nālinī, Pt I, Ch IV, Pt III, Chs VIII and X

² Mr̥nālinī Pt IV, Ch IX

³ *Ibid*, Pt III, Ch VI

highly and Paśupati as a traitor was repulsive to her. Still she capitulated to his advances of marriage, though that could not take place owing to the attack of the Muslims on the city. She was a woman of moods and her beauty was different from Minalinī's. Manoramā was like a goddess made of flowers, like a lotus which blooms with the rise of the morning sun, Minālinī was like a lotus in the rainy season, modest in its own beauty.¹

Gurjāyā was Minālinī's devoted companion. Behind her outward gaiety and playfulness there was a note of seriousness or gravity which is evident from her songs. She was outspoken and was not afraid even to give Hemcandra a bit of her mind whenever he was in one of his fits of temper and moods of rage. Gurjāyā said, "You are a hero! You have come to exhibit such heroism in Nadiā? There was no need of it—you could have exhibited it in Magadha." Again she said, "You want to marry Minālinī? You are not even worthy of me."² Her courtship was rather primitive and she thrashed Digbijay with a broomstick as if it were the most natural thing to do.³ She occupies a place second only to Bimalā in importance among the minor female characters in the first three novels of Bankimcandra.

Paśupati was a capable man, but political motives made him entirely devoid of all sense of gratitude to his master. Ambition added to unscrupulousness led to his ruin and after the sack of Nabadvīp by the Muslims when he saw that his own hopes of

¹ Mrnālinī, Pt. II, Ch. VIII, Pt. I, Ch. IV.

² Mrnālinī, Pt. III, Ch. VIII.

³ *Ibid.* Pt. IV, Ch. X.

ascending the throne had melted away, he became a wiser man. Paśupati had created a rather inconvenient position for himself without in the least foreseeing that when the Muslims came to power, he would be the last man to be trusted by them. He refused at first to be converted to Islam when Bakhtyar Khalji pressed upon him the necessity of doing so, but eventually had to suffer even the indignity of wearing the dress of the Muhammadans when threatened with force by the Muslim envoy. He had already guessed that the Muslims were not his friends and he himself was the cause of his own undoing, having lost in addition everything that a man might prize in life. He expiated all his sins in his death under tragic circumstances. His thoughts in his last moments were of Manoramā and in a mad frenzy as he tugged at the golden image of the Goddess, whom he worshipped every day, he fell stunned by the debris of the building which collapsed. His death amidst the flames was a fitting conclusion to his career.

In the treachery of Paśupati, in the meanness of his lieutenant Śāntaśil, a renegade who entered the service of the Muslims after the extinction of the Hindu power and earned a living by slandering his own race, and in the despicable conduct of Brāhmanas like Dāmodar Śarmā, Bankimcandra has depicted certain characteristic national weaknesses. But these characters are inevitable in a novel which deals with calamitous times in the history of a people and are primarily intended as a warning to others, who might step into similar pitfalls and go down to history as ignominious traitors.

CHAPTER VII

BISABRĪKṢA

Plot

Nagendranāth, Zamindar of Gobindapur, on his way to Calcutta, was compelled to seek shelter in a house on account of a storm. There he found an old man on the point of death and his daughter Kundanandini. After the old man's death, Kunda was brought to Calcutta by Nagendranāth and left in charge of his sister Kamal. Later she came to Gobindapur. Nagendra's wife Sūryamukhī married Kunda to a young man, Tārācaran. After Tārācaran's premature death Kunda came to live at Nagendra's house. Nagendra was enamoured of her and Kunda also fell in love with him. Debendia Datta, Zamindar of Debipur, was also charmed with Kunda's beauty and visited Nagendra's house disguised as a Vaiṣṇavī in order to meet her. The maid-servant Hīrā found out the trick and informed her mistress. In the meantime Sūryamukhī had realised that her husband was in love with Kunda. She wrote to Kamal explaining the whole situation. Kamal wanted to take Kunda to Calcutta. One night Kunda tried to commit suicide, but she was unsuccessful in her attempt. Later she left the house on account of Sūryamukhī's continual reproaches. She was given shelter by Hīrā. When Nagendra came to know that his wife was responsible for Kunda's going away, he determined to leave his home.

in disgust. Kunda came back one day and Sūryamukhī insisted on her husband taking her. The second wife Sūryamukhī then left the house. Narendrak, finding out how much he loved his first wife, started in search of her. He neglected Kunda thinking her to be the cause of Sūryamukhī's disappearance. In the meantime Sūryamukhī having fallen ill on the way, had been living in the house of a Brahmacārī. Narendrak was wrongly informed that she was dead and he decided to forsake the world. On the night of his arrival at Gobindapur after a futile search for Sūryamukhī, she returned and was reunited to him. Kunda poisoned herself. Hirā had been seduced by Dhanraj Datta and became insane. Dehendrak died a victim of foul diseases.

Bisabrīsa was published in 1873. It had appeared previously in serial form in *Bangalārām*. About its popularity a contemporary periodical wrote, "This novel . . . was to be found in the burlap-bags of every Bengali Babu throughout the whole of last year."¹ A very discerning observer remarks, "Bisabrīsa stirred every mind in the homes of Bengal. It brought with it something which was within our own experience."² Rev. Lālbaharī De, on the other hand, wrote a review of it in the *Bengal Magazine*, which Bankimchandra thought was "faint praise and civil sneer." That the wellknown Bengali periodical *Somprakāś* did not speak highly of it is clear from the author's letter to a friend.³ A contemporary critic thought that Kunda's

¹ Calcutta Review, 1873, p. v.

² Prabāsī, Vol. XXXI, Pt. I, 806 f.

³ Bengal Past and Present, April-June, 1914, p. 258. In Mookerjee's Magazine (October, 1873, pp. 542-44) an article appeared, part of which was meant for those critics who disparaged the writings

suicide was likely to have an evil influence on Bengali life ¹ Another writer objected to such things as kissing and embracing by some of the characters ² Criticisms like these are really petty. Nor can much credence be given to what Nabīncandra Sen writes in his autobiography He says that late in life Bankimcandra confided to him, " I wonder whether I have done good or evil to the country by my novels " ³ It does not seem probable that Bankimcandra would speak in such a way about his own works when there is no other instance of his having done so. He certainly was not referring to *Bisabrksa* which was popular with Western readers also Sir Edwin Arnold paid a high tribute to it.⁴ Bengali women even in the nineties of the last century were fond of it and one of them wrote a series of poems on the women characters of this novel ⁵

Bisabrksa is distinctly a novel with a purpose. The central problem in the story is the question of polygamy and incidentally the question of widow remarriage is broached by Bankimcandra His ideas about widow marriage are to some extent understood from Sūryamukhī's letter to Kamal, " A learned paṇḍit in Calcutta, named Īśvarcandra Vidyāsāgar, has published a book on the marriage of widows If he who would establish the custom of marrying widows is a

of Bankimcandra Bankimcandra's friend Dr Sambhuchandra Moolerjee wrote it under the pen name of "An Amateur Homeopath "

¹ P C Basu, *Sāhityacintā*, p 52

² Mahendranāth Majumdar, *Sāhitya o Samāj*, p 40

³ *Āmār Jiban*, Vol IV, p 363

⁴ Preface to Mrs Knight's "Poison Tree "

⁵ *Sāhitya*, Vol II.

pandit, then who can be called a dunce ?" ¹ Nagendra consoled himself with the thought that widow remarriage was sanctioned by the Sāstras and no one would dare to outcast him from society as he was a wealthy man ² Truly did Kamal remark, " In what respect he is to blame, God knows, but what delusions he cherishes ! I think men understand nothing." ³

Before Bankimcandra wrote this novel there had been a compact body of public opinion in favour of widow remarriage ⁴ It is rather strange that a man of the new school like him could not lend full support to this movement. It may be that his pride as a Brāhman stood in the way of his completely identifying himself with such a cause Bankimcandra made himself more explicit in another place He adopted a *via media*. In his opinion it was not absolutely well for all widows to be married, but widows should have the right to marry if they like to do so ⁵

As a picture of domestic and social life in Bengal in the last century this novel has considerable importance It is not a romantic picture of society which existed long ago Rather, it is a realistic description of life in the times in which Bankimcandra lived. The description of Nagendra's ancestral house

¹ Bīṣabṛkṣa, Ch XI Vidyā-āgar s Bīdhabābībāha was published in 1854-55 and an English translation of it appeared in 1856

² Bīṣabṛkṣa, Ch XXV

³ Bīṣabṛkṣa, Ch XXVI

⁴ Dramas like Bīdhabāmanorañjan (1856), Bīdhabāparīṣayotsab (1857), Bīdhabābībāha Nāṭak (1857), Bīdhabodhāha Nāṭak (1856), Bīdhabābībāha Nāṭak (1854), openly advocated the remarriage of widows

⁵ Sāmya

was based on Bankimcandra's personal knowledge.¹ Nagendra is a typical wealthy man of those days. His sister Kamal was a modernised young lady living in the metropolis. The pleasant relation that existed between Kamal and Sūryamukhī is one of the happiest features of Bengali family life. In Satīs Kamal's son, Bankimcandra has given a happy glimpse of child life.²

Nagendra's friend Haradeb had a philosophic vein. His ideas about love are extremely edifying.³ Haradeb is never actually brought before the readers. He remains in the background as the personification of a sincere friend, a faithful confidant and a well-read man to whom one could turn in hours of distress. Though Haradeb remains aloof from the main incidents of the novel, the impression that one gathers of him is that of a fascinating person, the like of whom there are not many in the novels of Bankimcandra. In his novels though he has idealised many pictures of friendship between women, most of his men characters are left without any friend of their own sex to whom they can open their hearts. Himself singularly fortunate in his friends, Bankimcandra denied to most of the men in his novels the pleasures of real friendship.

Debendra Datta called himself a social reformer. He founded a Brahma Samaj at Debipur where speech-making was the chief business. It does not seem

¹ Bankim Jibānī, p. 441

² Bisabrīkṣa, Ch. XIII

³ *Ibid.*, Ch. XXXII. Haradeb's letters are supposed to have been written by Bankimcandra's friend Jagadīśnāth Rāy. Bankim Jibānī, 3rd Edition, p. 275

likely that Bankimcandra intended to cast any aspersion on the Brahma Samaj. Debendra was interested in female education and the emancipation of women. But his conception of freedom for them meant seducing them and leaving them to take care of themselves. Debendra Datta would have been a better man if he had been happy in married life. Many Bengali couples are ill-matched and untold misery follows.

Tārācaran, the village schoolmaster, is an over-drawn picture. He had read Addison and Goldsmith and three books of Euclid. He had a smattering of English education and was a regular member of Debendra's Brahma Samaj, where he used to read articles written for him by the village paṇḍit, or copied from current periodicals.

R. W. Frazer suggests that Bankimcandra "hemmed in his characters with a surrounding of Eastern mysticism." Frazer stretches his imagination so far as to find in Nagendra's love for Kunda "the fettering of the soul by the objects of sense" and in his love for Sūryamukhī "the mystic love of the soul for God."¹ It is perfectly clear that Bāṅkimcandra was not weaving a net of mysticism in this novel, but was describing life as he saw it and as he knew it, for there is nothing vague or symbolical in the atmosphere of *Bīṣakṛkṣa*.

¹ Literary History of India, p. 427

CHAPTER VIII

INDIRĀ

Plot

Indirā, a Bengali girl, daughter of Haramohan Datta of Maheśpur, was going from her father's to her husband's house and at a lonely place on the way she and her attendants were attacked by a gang of robbers. All her companions fled and she sought shelter in a Brāhman's house. Unable to return either to her father or to her husband as she could not get any reliable escort, she came to Calcutta, where she had some relatives. When she could not find out their address, she entered the service of Rāmram Datta as a cook. Rāmram's daughter-in-law Subhāsinī became very fond of Indirā and gradually came to know her real history. Subhāsinī's husband Raman Babu was a lawyer and had many clients. One of them, who came to dine with Raman Babu, was recognised by Indirā as her husband Upendra. After consultation with Subhāsinī, Indirā made an appointment with Upendra, who however did not recognise his wife. He thought her to be Kumudinī, a cook in Rāmram's house. Upendra had fallen in love with Indirā and she left Subhāsinī's house and lived with him. Ultimately he decided to take her to his own house. Indirā came to Maheśpur under some pretext, went to her father's house and explained to her parents everything. When Upendra came there he found out that Kumudinī

In *Chandraśekhara*, Sundari dressed herself as a barber-woman to find out Śaibhīm¹. Foster joined the service of Dyer Sombre as John Stalvert. Hemendra introduced himself at Mathura as Ratnadās after his secret marriage with Mināhī. Durr in *Rājasmā* danced before the Mughals as Meherjān². Mānāhī got into the Mughal army in the clothes of a Mughal soldier.³ Mubārak dressed himself as a merchant so that nobody might think that he was alive.⁴

The most vivacious of Bankimchandra's heroines, Indirā is a girl with buoyancy of spirit and plenty of sound commonsense. She may be a bit outspoken, a bit too free and frank, unreserved and openhearted, but these things only add to her charm. Though she is different from Bhīratī in Saratendra's *Pather Dābī* or the sisters of Amit in Rabindranāth's *Seśer Kabitā* in education and social status, still in youthful optimism they are similar. Indirā does not seem to have any respect for the opposite sex. In fact she ridicules men. She thinks that the intelligence of men reaches its climax with success in college examinations or earning money in the legal profession and is sure that they would be the last persons to understand her. Moreover they had views far different from hers. Men advocated the remarriage of widows, the marriage of girls at an advanced age, the education of women—all

¹ *Chandraśekhara*, Pt I, Ch IV.

² *Ibid*, Pt VI, Ch IV.

³ *Mṛgābhūṣ*, Pt IV, Ch XI.

⁴ *Rājasmā*, Pt III, Ch VIII.

⁵ *Ibid*, Pt III, Chs IX, X.

⁶ *Ibid*, Pt VII, Ch IV.

of which, of course, she disliked. Bankimcandra was expressing through Indirā what the average Bengali woman of his days probably thought about the liberal views of men.¹

Induā regarded the house of her husband as the garden of Heaven, where the cuckoo sang every day, the south wind blew even in winter and the full moon shone throughout the whole year. Her dream was realised when she was reunited to her husband. All the wealth of Haramohan Datta could not make her happy, but her acknowledged position as Upendra's wife made the world look brighter and more cheerful for her. As she passes out of the story on the way to her husband's house, musing on her happiness found at last, she leaves behind her the impression of a loving wife, rich in her husband's love and proud of her place by his side.

¹ Indirā, Ch. XVI

Tāmrāipta, modern Tamluk in Midnapore district), which was an important port in ancient days.¹ Early in the fifth century A.D., Fa Hian, the Chinese traveller, spent two years at this place and travelled from this port to Ceylon by the sea-route. Hsuan Tsang noticed it as an important harbour, having ten Buddhist monasteries with one thousand monks and an Asoka tope.² Bankimcandra once visited the place in 1860 when his brother Śyāmācaran was there and writing many years after, he remembered the sea of which he had glimpses at Tamluk.³ The grandeur and beauty of the sea had once already been described by him in *Kapālakundalā* and *Yugalāṅguriya* confirms the view that Bankimcandra retained his early love for the sea.

The main theme of both these stories is the troubled course of true love. The belief in astrological calculations is predominant in *Yugalāṅguriya*, while nothing like that finds a place in *Rādhārānī*. Hiranmayī and Rādhārānī are both examples of love which growing early in life does not wane with circumstances. Even when King Madan Deb held before her attractions of wealth, Hiranmayī regarded herself as Purandar's wife. In *Rādhārānī*, Bankimcandra introduced a heroine who chose her own husband. Her conversation with Rukminikumār was nothing like that of the bashful Bengali girl. It was pure courtship in a new style. A Bengali girl in Bankimcandra's days

¹ Cunningham, *Ancient Geography of India*, p. 504

² Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, Vol. II, pp. 189-190, *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. XVII, p. 329

³ Bankim Jibanī, 3rd Edition, p. 304

seldom arranged her own marriage. Rādhārānī foreshadowed some of the more modernised heroines in Bengali fiction like Bijayā in Śaratcandra's *Dattā* or Lalitā in Rabīndranāth's *Gorā*. She is an outcome of the new influences that were at work upon society. There is no moral, social or political theory in either of these novels. They prove that social conditions do not stand as barriers in the way of romantic attachments and as lovers the ancients and the moderns are the same.

CHAPTER X

CANDRAŚEKHAR

Plot.

Pratāp Rāy and Saibalini had loved each other since their childhood. When they found out that their marriage was barred by relationship, they swam to the middle of the Ganges to die. Saibalini was afraid of death and came back. Pratap was rescued by a Brahman scholar, named Candrasekhar, who eventually married Saibalini. Pratap married a girl named Rupasi and went to live at Monghyr. Saibalini could not forget Pratap. Foster, an Englishman, was enamoured of Saibalini's beauty and kidnapped her. The Nawab Mir Kāsim was at that time ruler of Bengal. Trouble was brewing between him and the English and it was supposed that his General, Gurgan Khān, was waiting for this opportunity to supplant his master.

Dalanī Begam, one of the wives of Mir Kāsim, became anxious over the impending war between her husband and the English. In reality she was the sister of Gurgan Khān, but nobody else knew anything about their relationship. She met him one night to dissuade him from precipitating the fight. But Gurgan's inordinate ambition clashed with Dalanī's interests and he ordered that she and her maid Kulsam were not to be allowed to re-enter the fort. Candrasekhar accidentally found them in a helpless state and conducted them to Pratap's residence. On the same night Pratap had

rescued Saibalini from Foster's boat and brought her to his house. Acting on some secret information, the English attacked Pratāp's house, captured him and carried away Dalani, under the impression that she was Saibalini. In the meantime Candrasekhar had written to Mīr Kāsīm that Dalani was in Pratāp's house under his protection. The Nawab's messengers escorted Saibalini as they thought her to be the Begam and as she also did not protest. With the Nawab's permission Saibalini who posed as Pratāp's wife followed him and rescued him from the boat of the English as she still loved him. Pratāp asked Saibalini to forget him. She then took shelter on a hill and after passing through mental and physical agony was forgiven by her husband.

Dalani was not found in spite of the Nawab's efforts. She had been left in a lonely place by the English. Candrasekhar's preceptor Rāmānanda Svāmī found her there and sent her to the Nawab's General, Takī Khān, who falsely informed the Nawab that the Begam was not faithful to him. The irate Nawab ordered her death by poison. The brave girl smilingly drank poison as desired by her husband. Pratāp had already joined the army of the Nawab. Kulsam in open court accused Takī Khān of having brought about her mistress's death. When the Nawab came to know of Dalani's innocence, he killed Takī Khān with his own sword. Just before the final struggle between the English and the Nawab's forces, Pratāp met Saibalini, who told him that so long as he lived she would not be happy. The large-hearted Pratāp died in the battlefield after performing daring feats of heroism.

Candraśekhara was published in 1875. Contemporary opinion was not favourable to this novel. The *Calcutta Review* wrote, "The present work, we confess, is to a certain extent disappointing. We miss in it the graphic character-painting, the rich and vivid description, the deep pathos which the author has taught us to expect in his writings."¹ The *Calcutta Review* certainly underestimated the merit of *Candraśekhara*, which is, as will be seen later, lacking neither in character-painting nor in pathos. If exception could be taken to anything in it, it might be to some statements of Bankimchandra which have an air of offensiveness about them. Bankimchandra might have really been blamed for saying that the ancestors of many of the landholders in Bengal were mere freebooters,² and the Muhammadan Khānsimā of the English was the lowest type of human being.³ Even though it be admitted that the first opinion has some truth in it, this aggressive way of stating it is at least lacking in tact, while the second statement is too sweeping a judgment.

The whole tone of this novel tends to the view that there is a curse resting on early love. Several types of love have been treated in this novel. There is the quiet and unassuming love of Dalanī, who prized the love of the Nawab above everything else. In girlish modesty and simplicity Dalanī reminds one of Amy Robsart in Scott's *Kenilworth*. She sacrificed her life when she heard that the Nawab had

1875, pp. vi-xiii

² *Candraśekhara*, Pt. IV, Ch. I

³ *Ibid*, Pt. III, Ch. V

ordered her death. Mīr Kāsim looked upon Dalanī as as one of his many possessions. "Alas in this world power is like this!" commented Bankimcandra when the monarch grovelled in the dust for his lost love.¹

The roots of Pratāp and Śaibalīnī's love were very deep. He had other occupations and activities in life and could repress his feelings, but Śaibalīnī regarded that love as everything in her life.² Pratāp's love for Śaibalīnī was no guilty love of the flesh. It meant self-sacrifice for the object of his love. The words of dying Pratāp to Rāmānanda Svāmī prove with what intensity and what sincerity he loved Śaibalīnī and how disinterested, noble and pure that love was. He felt that not only must he die for the sake of Śaibalīnī's happiness, but he must not be ungrateful to Candrasekhar, who was his benefactor. Rāmānanda Svāmī said to Pratāp, "If there is merit in controlling the senses, then eternal heaven is yours. If one can go to heaven by doing good to others, then you deserve heaven even more than Dadhīci."³ Śaibalīnī's love was like a storm and it raged as a tempest. She staked everything for Pratāp's sake—her home, her honour as a married woman, even her pride. She regarded herself and Pratāp as two flowers blooming on the same stalk in a garden, but torn asunder through evil fate.⁴

Candrasekhar was a Brāhman and a scholar in the truest sense. The significance of his character lies in the fact that Bankimcandra wanted to hold forth the

¹ Candrasekhar, Pt. VI, Ch. III.

² Cf. Byron regarding love as woman's sole existence.

³ Candrasekhar, Pt. VI, Ch. VIII.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Pt. VI, Ch. VI.

even in Europe, but education, he owed everything to his own genius, and nothing to art, or cultivation”¹ Bankimcandra gives a slight hint that Ghurghin turned a traitor to the Nawab.² It is probable that he has done less than justice to Ghurghin Khān

Bankimcandra was not fair to Takī Khān either. The *Seir* says, “This officer had the qualities of a Commander in Chief, and did richly deserve that high employment, much better at least, than such a cloth-seller by the yard, as was Gurghin-qhan . . . His conduct and name have been inscribed on the leaves of the historical page”³ Takī Khān died fighting in the battle of Katwa and was not killed for treachery as Bankimcandra says.⁴ He was not such a bad man as he has been depicted in *Candraśekhara*.⁵ One historian thinks that Bankimcandra cannot escape blame for distorting Takī Khān's character and for taking too much liberty with history.⁶ Such a charge has been levelled against novelists like Scott, but novelists have their defenders also. Butterfield says, “. . . the historical novelist owes a certain loyalty to the history of which he treats. But because this is a marriage of the arts it is not a complete loyalty”⁷ With regard to Ali Ibrāhīm Khān, Bankimcandra has been true to history. Mīr Kāsim regarded Ali Ibrāhīm as a great

¹ *Ibid*, Vol II, pp 279-80

² *Candraśekhara*, Pt VI, Ch III

³ *Seir Mutaqharin*, Vol II, p, 186

⁴ *Ibid*, pp 255, 258-59.

⁵ *Riyazu-s-salat*, p. 388 (Footnote)

⁶ K. P. Bandyopādhyāya, *Bānglār Itihās*, Nabābī Āmal, p 417

⁷ *The Historical Novel*, p. 6.

friend ¹ The translator of *Riyazu-s-salatın* refers to him as the "old, brave and loyal officer, Alı Ibrahim Khan, who clung to his old master with a fidelity uncommon in those treacherous days" ²

In *Candraśekhhar*, Bankimcandra paid a high tribute to British character. If he depicted one Lawrence Foster, he made ample amends by his expressed admiration for the British in other places of this novel. Amyatt, the head of the English factory at Patna, says, "On the the day that an Englishman decamps in fear of the inhabitants of this country, the hope of the foundation of British rule in India will disappear." Bankimcandra appreciated the British sense of duty and spirit of fearlessness. Amyatt died like a Briton fighting to the last and said before his death, "If we die here to-day, a fire will be kindled in Hindusthan which will reduce to ashes the Muhammadan empire. If this field be drenched with our blood, the royal flag of George III will easily be planted on it" ³ Bankimcandra defended the character of Warren Hastings. An empire-builder like him could not be narrow-minded and mean ⁴ Even Foster is not without some of the salient qualities belonging to his race. He says, "I shall die like an Englishman," and "The Englishman never lies" ⁵ These passages may be set over against the charge against Bankimcandra that he entertained anti-British feelings ⁶ A novelist

¹ Candraśekhhar, Pt VI, Ch III

² *Riyazu-s-salatın*, p. 322 (Footnote)

³ Candraśekhhar, Pt V, Ch I

⁴ Candraśekhhar, Pt VI, Ch IV

⁵ *Ibid*, Pt VI, Ch VII

⁶ Bangsbadı, Bhd-ı, 1330 B. Y., p. 71

who could write in such glowing terms of the British and especially in a novel which shows them at war with the power then ruling over Bengal, should be the last person to be accused of sentiments which might in any way be said to be antagonistic or hostile to the British.

CHAPTER XI

RAJANĪ

Plot.

Rajanī, a blind girl and heiress to a large property, which was being enjoyed by Rāmsaday Mitra, was the adopted daughter of Rājendra Dās, a flower-seller. She used to go with her flowers to the house of Rāmsaday and Rāmsaday's wife Labangalatā became very fond of her. Rajanī fell in love with Sacīndra, Rāmsaday's son by a former wife, but nobody knew anything of it. Labanga wanted to get Rajanī married to a Kulīn, Gopal Basu, who had already a wife, named Cāpā. Rajanī was averse to this marriage and ran away with Cāpā's brother Hīnālāl, who left her in a lonely place on the river when she refused his proposal of marriage. The poor girl jumped into the Ganges to end her life. She was rescued by a young man, named Amarnāth, who had at one time desired to marry Labanga. Since Labanga's marriage Amarnāth had once been to Benares where he heard the story of Rajanī told him by a chance acquaintance. Amarnāth had come to know that this girl's name was Rajanī. After he had rescued her, he decided to help Rajanī to recover the property and marry her. Rajanī consented out of gratitude though she still loved Sacīndra. Although claims to the property were given up by the Mitras, it was not taken possession of by Rajanī. Labanga realised that the only way of

retaining the property so that the whole family might be saved from starvation, would be to try to make her step-son Sacīndra fall in love with Rajanī. She succeeded in doing this with the help of a Sunnyāsī. But Rajanī would not be ungrateful to Ananāth. Lebunga then requested Ananāth to sacrifice his happiness for her sake, which he gladly consented to. He made over his own property to Rajanī and Sacīndra and left for Kashmir. Rajanī gained her eyesight by means of the treatment of a Sunnyāsī after her marriage with Sacīndra.

Rajanī which first appeared in *Bangdharan* was published in 1877. It is useful to note here that between the first version and some of the subsequent editions of Bankimchandra's novels there are considerable differences. *Rajanī* is a case in point. So much of the original serial was changed in the first edition that appeared in book-form that it may be said to be a new work. Bankimchandra adopted the plan followed by Wilkie Collins in the *Woman in White*, of letting each character tell his or her story. Browning followed the same plan in the *Ring and the Book* and Rabīndranāth has done so in his novel *Gharo Bāire* (*The Home and the World*).

The character of Rajanī was based on Nydia, the blind flower-girl in Lytton's *Last Days of Pompeii*. Rajanī was an intelligent girl and there is an element of humour in her nature. Hearing that the Monument in Calcutta was a grand edifice she accepted it as her husband.¹ From the moment Sacīndra touched her

hands accidentally she felt a deep love for him. No one understood her. She knew that this love of hers was tormenting. She felt that a woman was not beautiful without her eyes. Her one great desire was to see for a moment at least what exactly she was like, what Śacīndra was like and how the rest of the world looked.¹ Again and again she proved the nobility of her heart and at last she was blessed by her union with her beloved.

Amarnāth loved Labangalatā when he was very young. He was broken-hearted since her marriage. The story shows his disinterested service to others. He was a scholar well-read in Eastern and Western literature and history.² When he learnt that Rajanī loved Śacīndra he did not stand in the way of her happiness. He mused, "Śacīndra is Rajanī's, Rajanī belongs to Śacīndra. Who am I to stand between them?" and he was determined to make them happy.³ Labangalatā said to him, "You are extraordinary. Forgive me, I never knew your good qualities."⁴ She had branded him as a thief for an act of folly in his youth.⁵ His love had not found any return, but he was ready to do anything for Labanga's happiness. Amarnāth's love was entirely selfless. Like Pratāp he also had loved and lost. Saibahnī reciprocated Pratāp's love and Pratāp knew it. But Amarnāth drifted aimlessly along with the stream of life.

¹ Rajanī, Pt I, Ch III

² *Ibid.*, Pt III, Ch III

³ *Ibid.*, Pt V, Ch I

⁴ *Ibid.*, Pt V, Ch III

⁵ *Ibid.*, Pt IV, Ch IV

Labangalātā was happy in spite of her marriage with a fairly aged man. Witty, sprightly and cheerful her smile had a peculiar charm. Of the male sex she cherished no high opinion, but he found out that there was a limit even to woman's intelligence.¹ She told Amarnāth that nobody except her husband could expect anything else to love from her even if he were as great as the god Mohideb. In Labanga's tender heart there was a soft corner for Amarnāth though she would not openly admit it. Otherwise why did she suddenly stop and why did tears choke her voice? Her pride must have prompted her to boast, but the next moment her feelings got the better of her.²

To Śacindra Rajanī's beauty made no physical appeal. He did not at first even know that she loved him. She did not conform to his conception of an ideal wife.³ This may be a fling by Bankimcandra at the taste of contemporary young men who were fastidious in matrimonial matters. During his illness Śacindra saw Rajanī in dreams and fell in love with her. It is somewhat crude that a Tantrik ceremony performed by a Sannyāsi lay at the root of Śacindra's love.⁴ This seems to be one of the blemishes in the novel. But Bankimcandra believed in supernatural things and that partly justifies his use of the Sannyāsi

¹ Rajanī, Pt IV, Ch VII

² *Ibid*, Pt V, Ch III

³ *Ibid*, Pt III, Ch II

⁴ Rajanī, Pt IV, Ch VII. Cf. Last Days of Pompeii, Bk IV, Ch V, Nydia's love "philtre" and its effects on Glaucus

In this novel once more Bankimcandra shows his disapproval of Kulinism and vices like drinking. In the character of Hīrālāl, a thorough rascal, Bankimcandra caricatured contemporary pseudo-dramatists and contributors to periodicals. Śacīścandra Cattopādhyāya thinks that Hīrālāl is a caricature of a newspaper editor who had once maligned Bankimcandra.¹ Hīrālāl is a type of the tall-talker and humbug, who with little education poses as a great social reformer and thinks that drinking wine and writing indecent articles are signs of progress.

Bankimcandra was rather careful about hunting social susceptibilities. Hence he makes Śacīndra after his marriage with Rajanī leave Calcutta and live elsewhere lest people should whisper anything about his wife's former occupation as a flower-girl. It does not seem that Bankimcandra was conservative in outlook but a rather zealous carefulness to avoid anything of a controversial nature in his novels prevented him from giving a straightforward opinion on many topics of the day. This seems pretty obvious from what Amarnāth says about widow remarriage, abolition of the caste system, raising the age of marriage, intercaste dining, intercaste marriage, and emancipation of women.² Bankimcandra passed off as Amarnāth's opinion what views the average man with conservative ideas in his days cherished on important matters affecting life and society in Bengal.

¹ Bankim Kāhini (in Jibānī), p. 57. It is interesting to note here that Bankimcandra once humorously compared the critic to an ass — Collected Works, Vol. II, p. 691. It may be that he had in mind some newspaper critic like the one referred to by Śacīścandra.

² Rajanī, Pt. II, Ch. IV.

It would be interesting to note what Bankimcandra says in this novel about beauty. He writes, "Beauty is distorted by the eyes with which we see it. That really is beautiful in the enjoyment of which the senses create no change in the mind" ¹ In *Bibidha Prabandha* he says, "The enjoyment of beauty is a pleasure of the mind only, it has no relation to the senses. The pleasure which beauty affords is different from the satisfaction of the senses." ² Bankimcandra's attitude to beauty was that of a man of intellect rather than that of a man of emotions

Rajanī is a novel without any purpose. Much of the charm of a novel is lost if it is full of something on which the novelist is constantly focussing his attention and upon which he lavishes more care than he does upon the development of the plot or the delineation of the characters. In *Rajanī* one does not meet with extraordinary characters or a variety of wonderful incidents. One has to be content with a story of the everyday world, of daily life, of ordinary men, women and events. *Rajanī* has a distinct value as the first psychological novel in Bengali. It analyses the feelings that rise in the minds of its characters, but it contains no laborious or tedious dissection of emotions and thoughts

¹ *Ibid*, Pt II, Ch I

² *Collected Works*, Vol I, p. 794

CHAPTER XII

KṚṢṆAKĀNTER UİL

Plot.

After Kṛṣṇakānta Rāy, zamindar of Haridrāgrām, had made his will, his son Haralāl objected to his cousin Gobindalāl getting half the share of the property and threatened his father that he would marry a widow unless the will was changed. Kṛṣṇakānta then made another will depriving Haralāl of a large part of his share. Haralāl bribed Brahmānanda, the clerk, who had drawn up the will for Kṛṣṇakānta to forge another, the contents of which would be in his favour. Brahmānanda's widowed niece Rohinī promised to put this will in Kṛṣṇakānta's drawer and get the other one on the understanding that Haralāl would marry her. When she had done it, he refused to marry her and Rohinī would not let him have the other will she had stolen. One night she went to replace the genuine will in Kṛṣṇakānta's room as she was afraid of the secret coming out some day, but was caught in the act. She was not severely dealt with as Gobindalāl interceded for her. Rohinī had fallen in love with him but he had a wife. She tried to drown herself but Gobindalāl saved her life. Rohinī's beauty cast a spell over his mind and he left home to forget her. Gradually the scandal about him and Rohinī reached the ears of his wife Bhramar. Gobindalāl on his return found that Bhramar had gone away to her

father's place without waiting for him. Kṛṣṇakānta became seriously ill and Bhramar returned. Before his death Kṛṣṇakānta changed his will and made Bhramar his heiress. Gobīndalāl left for Benares thinking it undignified to live on his wife's money. Soon he vanished and Rohiṇī also left the village. Bhramar became heart-broken and fell ill. Her father Mādhabināth found out that Gobīndalāl and Rohiṇī were living together at Prasādpur. He went there with his friend Nisākar, who was a handsome man. Nisākar entered Gobīndalāl's residence on the pretext of meeting him and arranged a tryst with Rohiṇī outside. Gobīndalāl followed her and killed her as a faithless woman. He was arrested, but escaped punishment through his father-in-law's influence. Bhramar was dying slowly. Just before her death, Gobīndalāl came to see her and then left for some unknown destination.

Kṛṣṇakānter Uil was published in 1878. In the first edition of the novel Gobīndalāl was drowned one morning in the Bārūnī tank. The episode was subsequently rewritten by Bankimchandra.

Gobīndalāl was a man of high and noble character at first. His way of thinking was, "Everything is beautiful, it is only unkindness that is ugly. Nature is kind, but man alone is unkind."¹ The desire in his heart for Rohiṇī arose in a moment of weakness. It was a desire for novelty. Old Kṛṣṇakānta shrewdly guessed that his nephew's head had been turned by Rohiṇī's beauty. From that time a change came over

¹ *Kṛṣṇakānter Uil*, Pt. I, Ch. VII. There is an Wordsworthian echo here.

Gobindalāl. Here was a woman more beautiful than his wife. He must have derived some inward pleasure from the thought that such a woman loved him. The misunderstanding between him and his wife partly contributed to his moral downfall. If he had but once asked for his wife's forgiveness he might have been happy, but his pride, his shame, his sin stood in the way of his happiness. Still all the fault was not his. Bhramar's attitude towards him aggravated matters. She took a strong stand and so neither of them had the chance of an explanation which would have led to a reconciliation. It was too late when he understood that beauty could not supply the place of love.

Bhramar is introduced to us as a happy wife. She had absolute faith in her husband, but when she found that there were reasons to think of him otherwise she wrote to him plainly, "So long as you were worthy of respect, I was devoted to you, so long as you were worthy of trust, I had faith in you. But now I am no longer devoted to you, no longer do I believe you, I have no further pleasure in seeing you." It was not that she ceased to love him, but she placed virtue above her husband. He had taught her the greatness of truth and when he was no longer true to his wife, he could not expect her to have respect for him. Bhramar was not the typical Hindu wife obedient to her husband under all circumstances. Her character is a protest against the conventional idea that the husband's will is always to be obeyed. Her submission

to the will of her husband would have brought Bhramar happiness, but the charm of her character would have been unpaired in that case. Bhramar could never for a moment forget that her husband was a murderer. The blood of Rohinī stood between her and her husband. They met just before her death and Gobīndalāl understood that happiness had slipped out of his hands through his own folly.

The pivot of Rohinī's character was her insatiable desire. The position of a widow was a problem in Bengali society in Bankimcandra's days and to some extent it still is so. In Rohinī's musings the most prominent note was that the infinite beauty of life has not been enjoyed.¹ The keynote of her character is that she was jealous of the happiness of others. If she had had a husband in whose love she could be happy, she would not have grudged others their happiness. Though she longed for death day and night she had not the courage to die. The knowledge that Gobīndalāl had guessed that she loved him gave her pleasure. She tried to commit suicide but chance made Gobīndalāl her rescuer. From that time her desire to die decreased. Even after Gobīndalāl was vanquished by her beauty and had entered upon an illicit life with her, she still craved for fresh conquests and was flattered by the idea that Nisākar was a victim of her charm. Rohinī had not the heart to face death bravely when Gobīndalāl was on the point of shooting her. She reflected that she was young, she was happy according to her own ideas of happiness and she wanted to live.

¹ Kṛṣṇakānter Uil, Pt. I, Ch. VI.

She did not really love him. It was a temporary infatuation and nothing else. In her death-scene there is something of a melodramatic touch. Gobindalāl's highsounding words to her and her pathetic words praying for her life, all seem very unreal and exaggerated.

Bankimcandra's knowledge of Bengali life in many of its aspects is clearly manifest in this novel. Of special interest are the descriptions of the Kāchārī or office of Kṛṣṇakānta where he gave audience to his tenants,¹ his "śrāddha" ceremony,² the servants gossiping among themselves,³ and the talk of the village-women,⁴ all of which display the novelist's intimate acquaintance with the life around him. In minor things like the description of the Bārūnī garden, Bankimcandra was at his best.⁵ In this description there is a personal touch. At Kātālpāiā there was a garden near a tank, called Arjunā, and it must have been in Bankimcandra's mind when he wrote this novel.⁶ Bankimcandra's own fondness for tobacco is apparent from his laudation of it in *Bisabrakṣa*.⁷ Kṛṣṇakānta also was fond of smoking. But he had another weakness. Under the intoxicating influence of opium he used to see strange visions.⁸ In 1875 *Kamalākānter Daptar*—

¹ Kṛṣṇakānter Uil, Pt. I, Ch. XI

² *Ibid.*, Pt. I, Ch. XXVIII

³ *Ibid.*, Pt. I, Ch. X

⁴ *Ibid.*, Pt. I, Ch. XXI

⁵ Kṛṣṇakānter Uil, Pt. I, Chs. VII, XI

⁶ Barānu Jibānī, pp. 31-32

⁷ *Bisabrakṣa*, Ch. X

⁸ Kṛṣṇakānter Uil, Pt. I, Ch. III

the musings of Kamalākānta Cakravartī—written by Baṅkimcandra was published, reminding one of De Quincey's *Confession of an English Opium Eater*. Kṛṣṇakānta's brain under the influence of opium would be in a muddle like that of Kamalākānta, but there is absolutely no reason to suppose that Baṅkimcandra himself was fond of this drug.

Kṛṣṇakānter Uil is purely a domestic novel written with the purpose of showing Bengali family life with the larger background of social life. But it is no problem-novel like *Bisabr̥ṣa*. The position of the widow in Bengali society is not the subject-matter of the novel, though there is some reason for thinking that the question of the remarriage of widows was in Bankimcandra's mind when he wrote it. A story of human passions—fierce and tender, of relations—the holiest and the most sinful that can exist between man and woman, it deals with the ruin of a noble soul, the grimmest tragedy that wrecked a happy wedded life, the gradual downfall of a generous man and it was not without reason that the author regarded *Kṛṣṇakānter Uil* as his best novel ¹

¹ Baṅkim Jībanī, p. 441

CHAPTER XIII

RĀJSIMHA

Plot

Cañcalkumārī, princess of Rupnagar, one day in passion trampled under foot a picture of the Emperor Aurangzib. The news reached Delhi and the Emperor promised his wife Udipurī Begam that he would have the princess brought to his harem and that she should prepare tobacco for the Begam. He sent his general Mabarak with an army to Rupnagar to propose marriage to the princess. This Mabarak was a lover of the Emperor's daughter Zebunnisa. Aurangzib's Hindu wife Jodhpurī Begam wrote to Cañcalkumārī advising her not to come to Delhi. The Rupnagar chieftain was a feudatory and was powerless before the Emperor. On the advice of her friend Nirmalkumārī, Cañcal appealed to Mahārānā Rājsimha of Udaipur for protection. The bearer of the letter was stopped on the way by robbers, but fortunately the letter reached the Mahārānā who was out hunting at that time. He rescued the princess from the hands of the Mughals, who were carrying her off to Delhi and conveyed her to Udaipur. The Rupnagar chieftain on being asked by the Mahārānā for the hand of the princess replied that he would gladly consent if the Mahārānā could save him from the Emperor's wrath. Aurangzib at this time reimposed the jazia tax on the Hindus. This was a tax

upon all Hindus for permission to live and practise their religion in an Islamic state. It had been abolished by Akbar. The Mahārānā wrote a letter of protest against the imposition of this tax and sent it to the Emperor through a trusted soldier, Māniklāl. The Mahārānā's letter incensed Aurangzib and he decided on war as he had been affronted. In the meantime Mabarak had incurred the displeasure of Zebunnisa. He was ordered to be killed, but his life was saved by Māniklāl with whom Mabarak came to Udaipur. After this Zebunnisa felt repentant as she really loved him. In the war with the Rājputs, the Mughals were compelled to seek for peace after Udipurī Begam and Zebunnisa were captured by the Rājputs and all food supplies cut off. Zebunnisa met her lover with the assistance of Nirmal and they were secretly married. The Mahārānā set Udipurī Begam and Zebunnisa free, but only after the former had prepared tobacco for the Rupnagar princess as an astrological calculation had foretold that Cañcal would not be married unless an Empress prepared tobacco for her. Shortly afterwards Aurangzib sent another expedition against Rājsimha. This time Cañcal's father joined the Mahārānā and the Mughals were once more defeated. Rājsimha and Cañcalkumārī were then married.

Rājsimha was published in 1882. The first edition was complete in nineteen chapters only. The story as originally written ended with the marriage of Māniklāl and Nirmal and the marriage of the Mahārānā with Cañcal. The defeat of Aurangzib at Deobari was slightly referred to. The fourth edition saw the novel in its present form. In a long

preface Bankimcandra explained the reason of his enlarging the story. He considered the Mahārānā a great hero and felt that history had not been fair to him. He thought that full justice could not be done to Rājsimha's character unless the Rajput-Mughal fights were described at some length and that was the reason why in the fourth edition the novel was expanded. It is worth noting that Bankimcandra regarded *Rājsimha* as an historical novel, in fact his first historical novel. But this was not strictly correct. *Mrnālinī*, published in 1869, was described on the title-page as "aitihāsik upanyās". As he himself points out, so far as the main incidents of the novel are concerned he followed history, but in minor details he furnished his own materials. The main characters are based on history but some of the actions attributed to them are not actually historical.

By way of apology for introducing unhistorical matter into the story Bankimcandra wrote, "The purpose of history can sometimes be served by the novel. The novelist is not always bound by the chain of truth. According to his own wishes, for his own purposes, he can take the help of imagination. But the novel can never take the place of history. In a novel everything need not be historical."

Rājsimha marks a new period in the literary career of Bankimcandra. Hitherto he had confined himself mostly to the history of Bengal, but this time he went to the history of the Rājputs for his materials. He was, however, not treading an absolutely unfamiliar track. Rungālī's *Padmīnī* (1859), and *Surasundarī*

¹ Tol, The Annals and Antiquities of Prowahan, Vol. I, p.

(1861), Madhsūdan's *Kṛṣṇakumārī* (1861) and Rameś-candra's *Rājput Jībansandhyā* (1879) had to some extent familiarised Bengali readers with stories from Rājasthān.

Bankimcandra followed Tod's account with regard to the demand Aurangzib made to the Chieftain of Rupnagar.¹ Recent historians doubt the accuracy of Tod's account and are inclined to think that the fighting between Aurangzib and Rājsimha occurred eighteen or nineteen years after the marriage of Rājsimha and Rupkumārī.² The re-imposition of the *jāzā* tax³ upon the Hindus led Rājsimha to address a dignified letter to the Mughal Emperor in the name of the Hindus. This letter has a parallel in the letter that the poet Pithvirāj of Bikanir wrote to Mahārānā Pratāp Simha.⁴ Tod has praised the tone of dignity and sincerity that runs through this letter.⁵ Some scholars, however, think that this letter was really written by Śhivaji to Aurangzib.⁶ But even they

440-41 The same theme has furnished material for a poem in English by a Bengali poet, G. C. Dutt (Maid of Roopnagar) in "Cherry Stones" (1881) and to Gujarati and Marathi writers like Harinārāyan Apte and Nārāyan Hemacandra

¹ Prabāsi, Vol XXX, Pt I, Mahārānā Rājsimha

² Elphinstone, History of India, p 622, J. N. Sarkar, History of Aurangzib, Vol III, p 305 Khafi Khan says, "With the object of curbing the infidels and of distinguishing the land of the faithful from an infidel land, the *jāzā* or poll-tax was imposed upon the Hindus throughout all the provinces"—Lane-poole, Mediaeval India from Contemporary Sources, p 132

³ R. C. Datta, Rājput Jībansandhyā, Ch XXVI

⁴ Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, Vol I, p 442

⁵ J. N. Sarkar, History of Aurangzib, Vol III, pp 325-29, Modern Review, January, 1908, Vincent Smith does not accept this theory of Prof J. N. Sarkar, Oxford History of India, p. 439.

admit that on the revival of the *jazia* tax, a demand had been sent to the Mahārānā for its enforcement throughout his state. It is beyond the scope of the present thesis to discuss who actually wrote the letter to the Mughal Emperor, but it would be quite in keeping with the Mahārānā's character to have done the thing Bankimcandra credited him with. According to the novel the Mahārānā's letter enraged Aurangzib to such an extent that he ordered a campaign against Mewār. The real cause of the war, however, was the protection given by the Rānā to the wife and children of Raja Jaswant Singh of Mārwar who was believed to have been poisoned by Aurangzib.² But these events are not at all referred to in this novel.

In Bankimcandra's opinion the invasion of Mewār could only be compared to the invasion of Greece by Xerxes. His comment is, "We commit to memory Greek history, but we know nothing of the history of Rājsimha. That is the benefit of modern education!"³ His contempt for so-called history is clear from the remark he made regarding Dara's Rājput wife who committed suicide rather than become the wife of Aurangzib.⁴

The picture of the Mughal harem drawn by Bankimcandra is not far different from contemporary accounts of it. Tavernier whom we can regard a

¹ Sarkar, Aurangzib, Vol. III, p. 383

² Smith Oxford History of India, p. 438

³ Rājsimha, Pt. V, Ch. VI

⁴ The wife of Dara to whom Bankimcandra refers was really a Hindu dancing girl who remained faithful to the memory of the Prince — Niccolò Manucci, Storia do Mogol, Vol. I, pp. 54-62

trustworthy observer of things says, " It is not difficult to imagine that strange things take place in the enclosure where these women and girls are shut up " In spite of Aurangzib's orders music, dancing and drinking were in vogue there ² The Emperor's daughter Zebunnisa was unmarried, but she had many favourites.³ She once said to her lover Mabarak, " Am I the daughter of a Hindu Brāhman or a Rajput that throughout life I should serve one husband and then die in the fire ? If such had been the wish of God, He would not have made me the daughter of an Emperor " ⁴ To her, love meant sorrow and princesses she said were not meant to bear any sorrow in life.⁵

Bankimcandra followed Manucci and Orme in his description of the character of Udipuri Begam. Orme is responsible for the account of her capture by the Rājputs ⁶ Manucci refers to her habit of drinking and records how on one occasion she was so drunk that she could not come to Aurangzib's presence and when

¹ Tavernier, Travels in India, Vol I, p 300 He also gives a glimpse of the Imperial harem where heinous crimes were committed — P 313

² Lanepoole, Aurangzib, p 101, Sarkar, Aurangzib, Vol III, p 93 f, Bernier, p 274 The Kenchens or Nautch-girls were allowed to come to the Am-kas to salām Aurangzib from a certain distance

³ F F Catrou (The General History of the Mogol Empire, pp 325 31) definitely states that the women in the seraglio kept gallants and enjoyed more liberty than was decent for princesses Manucci does not say if Zebunnisa was married — J N Sarkar (Modern Review, January, 1916) thinks that the stories about Zebunnisa's lovers were inventions of Urdu romanticists of Northern India

⁴ Rājsimha, Pt II, Ch III

⁵ Ibid, Pt II, Ch VII

⁶ Historical Fragments, p 107 f, Storia do Mogor, Vol II, p 241 J N Sarkar discredits the account of Udipuri Begam's capture — Aurangzib, Vol. III, p 431

he went to her apartments he found her all in disorder ¹ This incident must have been in the mind of the novelist when he speaks of Zebunnisa finding Udipuri hopelessly drunk ² Of course, Manucci was not a trustworthy historian and mixed his own inventions with court-scandal and gossip But the novelist creates his own characters and cannot be blamed for not always sifting historical matter. Professor Saintsbury remarks, "It is constantly useful, and it may at times be indispensable, for the historical novelist to take liberties with history" ³

Nirmalkumārī is one of the most fearless girls in Bankimcandra's novels No amount of threatening could make her divulge to the Emperor how she had got admission to his palace She said, "The daughter of a Hindu is not afraid of dying in the fire Has not the Emperor of Hindusthan heard that with a smile the daughter of a Hindu dies in burning fire with her husband ? The threat that comes from you has been the lot of my mother and grandmother, who in the past have died in the fire It is also my hope that through the grace of God I shall have a place beside my husband and be burnt alive" ⁴ Again she said, "Emperor, have you never heard that Hindu women practise fasting ? Have you never heard that they starve themselves to death ?" ⁵ The faithful wife of a poor Hindu soldier rejected all the offers of the proudest Mughal Emperor

¹ *Stories de Meccor*, Vol II, pp 107-8

² *Rajsinha*, Pt II, Ch V

³ *Letters in English Literature*, 1750-1870, Second Series, I 342
See also *The Nation*, 1877, p 123

⁴ *Rajsinha*, Pt VI Ch V

⁵ *Id.*

Bankimchandra has not been fair to Aurangzib¹ It is doubtful if ever this stern Mughal Emperor fell in love History speaks of his "cold austerity"² Whatever might have been his other faults, at least he was no moral weakling like some of his successors on the throne of Delhi³ Therefore, when the novelist makes him indulge in sentimental language it seems like bathos Bankimchandra spoke of Jodhpuri Begam as Aurangzib's first consort History mentions on the other hand, Dilras Bannu, Nawab Bai, Aurangabad and Udaipuri as his wives⁴ Bankimchandra played a trick with chronology when he wrote that peace was concluded between the Mughals and the Rājputs in Rājsimha's life-time Peace was definitely made between Aurangzib and Rājsimha's successor Jaysimha in June, 1681, eight months after Rājsimha's death⁵

In the women characters of this novel there is a steadfastness of purpose and they have no hesitation in doing difficult things Women do things in that way They do not think much before plunging into an adventure Their policy is swift action, specially when something important is at stake Men take more time to think, they weigh the pros and cons, they deliberate

¹ Rājsimha, Pt II, Ch V

² Lanepoole, Aurangzib, p 87, Lanepoole, Mediaeval India, p 359f

³ Mir'at ul-'alam of Bahhtawar Khan praises "the excellent character, the worthy habits and the refined morals of this most virtuous monarch"—Lanepoole, Mediaeval India from Contemporary Sources p 120

⁴ Sarkar, Aurangzib, Vol V, p 476

⁵ Sarkar, Aurangzib, Vol III, p 430, Lanepoole, Mediaeval India p 386

⁶ Rābīndranath Thākur, Ādhanik Sāhitya, p 58

late and think twice before jumping into the unknown. When Cañcal broke the portrait of Aurangzib into pieces she did not consider the effects. It was a mere impulse of the moment. Zebunnisa did not think seriously when she ordered Mabarak to be poisoned.

Bankimcandra made it sufficiently clear in the last chapter of his novel that it was never his intention to glorify one community by belittling another. He never believed that simply because a man was a Hindu he would be good and simply because a man was not a Hindu he would be bad. Bankimcandra has been regarded as anti-Muhammadan in sentiment ¹. That is a charge which is well refuted by Bankimcandra's own writings. But it is not impertinent on the part of the historical novelist to have some attachment for his race. An eminent critic like Brande Matthews says, "Not only is it impossible for a man to get away from his country, but it is equally impossible for him to get away from his own nationality. Has any author ever been able to create a character of a different stock from his own? Certainly all the greatest figures of fiction are compatriots of their authors" ². Bankimcandra's principal aim was to make Rājsimha more familiar to his countrymen and naturally his mind was full of sympathy for the Rājputs. His admiration for Rājsimha must remain as his sole defence for any wilful tampering with history in this novel.

¹ The Indian World, December, 1907, pp. 525-26.
The Forum, Vol. XXIV, 1907-08, p. 84.

CHAPTER XIV

ĀNANDAMATH

Plot.

In consequence of the great famine of 1770 as a result of which parts of Bengal were depopulated and devastated,¹ Mahendra Sunha, a zamindar, left his home with his wife Kalyānī and daughter Sukumārī for the city. While he was searching for milk for the baby, some robbers came and captured his wife and daughter. Taking advantage of a quarrel among the robbers, Kalyānī escaped with her daughter and was succoured by a Sannyāsī, Satyānanda, who had organised a band of Sannyāsīs known as "Santāns" or "Children" to free the country. The centre of their activities was known as "Ānandamath". Satyānanda's chief associates were Bhabānanda, Jibānanda and Dhūānanda. Kalyānī and her daughter came to the Math and Bhabānanda was sent to find Mahendra, who in the meantime had been arrested as a robber by the Sepoys. Bhabānanda rescued him from the Sepoys by a trick. On his arrival at the Math, Mahendra heard all about the creed of the Santāns and was eager to

¹ Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal*, pp 19-29, also *ibid*, Appendix B, J. C. Marshman, *An Outline of the History of Bengal*, p 192. In a letter, dated the 28th August, 1771, the Court of Directors of the East India Company commended those people who had helped to relieve the distress and expressed its indignation against those who had profiteered at that time.—Hunter, p 420

embrace it. But to meet one's wife and children after initiation into the sect was a sin. So he proposed first of all to take his wife and daughter to his village-home. On the way, Sukumārī, in ignorance, swallowed a poison-pill and became senseless. Kalyānī also took poison thinking her daughter dead. In the midst of his grief Mahendra heard Satyānanda singing a devotional song. Some Sepoys who were passing that way arrested Mahendra and Satyānanda as rebels. On his way to the prison Satyānanda went on singing. Jibānanda hearing the song understood from it that Sukumārī was lying in the forest and went in search of her. The poison had not killed the child and Jibānanda left her in the care of his sister Nīmāmaṇī with whom Jibānanda's wife Śāntī also lived. In the meantime the Santāns after a fight had rescued Mahendra and Satyānanda. By meeting his wife Jibānanda had transgressed the rules of the order. A further complication arose when Śāntī followed her husband to the Math in the guise of a young man and was initiated as a Santān. Satyānanda, however, guessed the real identity of Śāntī. Bhabānanda had found Kalyānī in the forest, discovered that she was still alive and had fallen in love with her. But Kalyānī repelled his advances. In a skirmish with the English, Bhabānanda fell fighting, though his men came out victorious. Mahendra was reunited to his wife and daughter and began to live with them at his native village. In a subsequent battle with the English, the Santāns won the day and Jibānanda fell wounded, but a mysterious great man (Mahāpuruṣ) restored him to Śāntī. Śāntī and Jibānanda spent the rest of their lives in the Himalayas.

Satyānanda was dissuaded by the same great man from fighting any more as all hopes of Hindu supremacy were over

Anandamath was published in 1882. In the preface to the third edition (1885) the author among the other things said, "A novel is a novel, it is not history." Referring to *Anandamath* Bankimchandra wrote in the preface to *Debi Chaudhurānī*, "It was not my intention to write an historical novel and therefore I did not pretend to be historical." He was protesting too much about history in his novels. Was this from a growing consciousness that he was not fair to actual historical matter?

The background of the novel is the Sannyāsi rebellion in Bengal described in the letters of Hastings as given in Gleig's *Memoirs of the Life of Warren Hastings*¹. In the early days of British rule in Bengal anarchy and lawlessness were rampant. Famine and virulent epidemics ravaged the country. "The country was full of disorderly elements—dacoits or robbers, with whom plundering was an hereditary occupation, religious devotees called sannyāsis or fakirs, who made religion as a cloak for robbery and lived on the country, disbanded soldiers and ruined peasants"². In one of his letters Hastings gives the following very strange

¹ Vol. I, p. 282, p. 285, p. 294, pp. 296-98, pp. 303-04. These letters were written to various people like Sir George Oglebrooke, Mr. Sykes, John Purling, Esq., Josias Dobre, Esq., during February and March, 1773—Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal*, pp. 70-71. In Hunter's *Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. VII, pp. 159-60, there is mention of some Sannyāsi insurrections in North Bengal even in 1782 and 1785.

² O'Malley, *History of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa*, pp. 206-07, J. M. Ghosh, *Sannyāsi and Fakir Raiders in Bengal*, pp. 50-52.

and surely inaccurate account of the Sannyāsīs “ The history of these people is curious They inhabit, or rather possess, the country lying south of the hills of Tibet from Caubul to China. They go mostly naked. They have neither towns, houses, nor families, but rove continually from place to place, recruiting their numbers with the healthiest children they can steal in the countries through which they pass Thus they are the stoutest and most active men in India Many are merchants. They are all pilgrims, and held by all castes of Gentoos in great veneration They are hardy, bold, and enthusiastic to a degree surpassing credit. Such are the Senassies, the gipsies of Hindostan ” ¹

One of the grandest conceptions in this novel and as a matter of fact in the whole range of Bengali literature, is the idealisation of the country as the Mother The song *Bande Mātaram* sung by Bhabānanda is Bankimcandra's call to nationalism through literature ² Bhabānanda said, “ We recognise no other mother We say, the country is the mother We have no mother, no father, no brother, no wife, no home, no habitation We have only that land, well-watered, fruitful, cooled by the south wind, green with crops ” The “ children ” regarded the country as a mother, the repository of all strength, the destroyer of all enemies, one whose image filled the

¹ G. R. Glegg, *Memories of the Life of Hastings*, Vol. I, pp. 303-04

² An excellent translation of “ *Bande Mātaram* ” appeared in the *Times*, September 13, 1906, and Sir Henry Cotton says that it was by Mr. W. H. L. C. S. Ananda Coomara Swamy reported this translation in the “ *Deeper Meaning of the Song* ” (1911, 6)

³ Ānandamath, II, I, Ch. X

temples, the goddess wielding the ten weapons, the source of wealth and wisdom, the giver of beauty, flowers and moonlight. The idea of the Great Mother is nothing new in Indian thought. To many Indian devotees God is as much Mother as Father since He is sexless.¹ This idea runs through all the Sākta literature of Bengal.² The teachings of Rāmkrṣṇa Paramahansa are full of the Mother-idea. Bankimcandra went further and combined the idea of the Mother and the Motherland and the result was the *Bande Mātaram* song. In the vision of Kamalākānta, Bankimcandra had already described his conception of the Motherland and the *Bande Mātaram* song was a further expression of that ideal.³

Satyānanda explained to Mahendra the different forms of the Mother—the Mother in her true self, the Mother as she was, the Mother as she is, and the Mother as she is to be.⁴ In the beginning the Mother is sitting on the lap of Viṣṇu, then she is Jagaddhātṛī, then Kālī and last of all she is Durgā. It is the last conception of the Mother that appealed to the Santāns most as it is in that form that she is universally worshipped in Bengal specially in autumn. But it is rather incongruous that the

¹ J. G. Woodroffe, *Bharata Shakti*, p. 123, also *Indian Art and Letters*, 1926, p. 67, *ibid*, 1927, p. 71, B. K. Sarkar, *The Futurism of Young Asia*, p. 268.

² Cf. the poetry of Rāmpresād Sen, Kamalākānta Bhaṭṭācāryya and others. See *Bengali Religious Lyrics, Sakta*, by E. J. Thompson and A. M. Spencer.

³ *Kamalākānter Daptar*, Ch. XI, the song has been sometimes misunderstood. See *Times* (London), September 12, 13, 14, 24, 1906.

⁴ *Ānandamath*, Pt. I, Ch. XI.

Santāns who professed themselves Vaiṣṇavas should instal Śākta idols in their temples and worship a Śākta deity instead of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. This necessitated a new interpretation of Vaiṣṇavism and Satyānanda said, "Caitanya Deb's Vaiṣṇavism is not true Vaiṣṇavism, it is a half religion. The Viṣṇu of Caitanya Deb is full of love but God is not only love, He is also eternal strength. Caitanya Deb's Viṣṇu is full of love, the Viṣṇu of the Santāns is full of strength."¹

The idea of the country as the Mother to which Bankimchandra gave such an impetus was seen in a more developed form at a later stage in Indian political and cultural history. Since the days of the Swadeshi agitation the country has been addressed as Mother India. The first appearance of that idea was in Bengal. It is prominent in the writings of poets like Rabīndranāth and in the writings and utterances of political leaders like C. R. Dās.² A close observer of the Bengali mind says, "Bengali Nationalism, unlike Nationalism in other parts of India, is not sprung from memory, but has an imaginative source . . .

Poets and novelists evoked the image of Bengal, the mother watching over her children, the Land served by the Ganges and wonderful with wide, emerald fields, gracious mango-groves, far-spreading silences and limpid skies."³

¹ Anandamath, Pt. II, Ch. IV. Bankimchandra, Collected Works, Vol. II, pp. 453-456-57. For Caitanya's Vaiṣṇavism, see Kailash Chandra, Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, p. 741-2, and M. M. Chakrabarti, Indian Philosophy, pp. 122-3.

² C. R. Dās, *History of the Indian National Congress*, Pt. I, pp. 1-2, 1-3.

³ 1-3-1935, *Prabhu*, 1-3-1935, p. 1-2, 1-3-1935, p. 1-2.

The most interesting woman in the story is Jibānanda's wife Sānti. In early life she was a bit wild, but education tamed her. She did not prevent her husband from following a life of service. On one occasion, when Jibānanda broke down she said, "Shame on you! You are a hero. It is my highest happiness that I am the wife of a hero. Will you forsake the duty of the hero for the sake of your humble wife? Do not love me. I do not want that happiness. But you should never give up your duty as a hero"¹ When she went to Satyānanda for initiation, she told him that a wife had a duty to her husband even when he dedicated his life to a noble cause. She said, "If the wife follows the husband, is that something against virtue? If the laws of the Śaṅkars regard that as something sinful then that religion is no religion at all"² To her husband she said, "Marriage is for this life and for the life hereafter. Think that our marriage for this life has not taken place. It is for the next life."³

The difference between Sānti and Kalyāṇī is that Kalyāṇī left her husband for his good, while Sānti followed her husband so that his life's mission might be truly fulfilled. When Satyānanda asked Sānti to dissuade Jibānanda from killing himself, she said, "My husband's duty is his own affair. Who am I to restrain him in such a matter? In this life, the husband is a god to the wife, but after death, duty is the god of all. To me my husband is great, but

¹ Anandamath, Pt I, Ch XVI

² *Ibid*, Pt II, Ch VII

³ *Ibid*, Pt III, Ch III

greater than he is his duty I may any day give up my duty, but why should I ask him to do so?"¹ Sānti had a lofty ideal of wedded love and looked at marriage from the religious standpoint²

Satyānanda was a patriot, an idealist and at the same time a man of action, who had dedicated his life to the service of the country, though his methods were not always honest. When his dreams of a Hindu supremacy were shattered, a mysterious Mahāpuruṣ came to him and said, "Your work is finished, the Muhammadan power is at an end. There is no need of unnecessary loss of human life." When the Mahāpuruṣ said that the English would rule over the country tears ran down the cheeks of Satyānanda. Looking at the image of the Mother with folded hands, the patriot said, "Alas, Mother! It has not been possible to free you. . . . Think it not the fault of your children. Alas, Mother! Why did I not die to-day in the field of battle?" The Mahāpuruṣ explained to him that British rule would be beneficial to the country. Satyānanda's work ended in failure as some of the associates chosen by him were moral defaulters. In a great enterprise men of firm character and strong principles are needed.

Both in the past and in recent years this novel has met with criticism from many quarters. An able observer of the Indian mind like the Earl of Ronaldshay (now Marquess of Zetland) thinks that it played a great part in what he regards as the "perverted

¹ Ānandamath Pt III Ch VII

² See Keshavnagar, The Book of "Sānti", for the Hindu ideal of marriage.

patriotism " of Indians ¹ Another writer mixes up the main idea of this novel as embodied in the *Bande Mātaram* song with the " cult of the bloodthirsty Kālī, Shakti worship and the revival of Tantric ritual," which, of course, is far from what Bankimchandra had in his mind ² Sir Valentine Chirol mistook the *Bande Mātaram* song for an old folksong. ³ But even the sternest critics of the song are agreed in the opinion that it has become the " Marseillaise " of nationalist Bengal and other parts of India ⁴ *Bande Mātaram* was certainly written to express " patriotic fervour," but it does not express " aggressive hostility " to the British as is assumed in some quarters ⁵

About the song itself Bankimchandra said, " One day you will see, after twenty years you will see, Bengal has become mad over this song—the Bengali has become excited " ⁶ Surendranath Banerjea writes, " Bankim Chunder Chatterjee could hardly have anticipated the part it was destined to play in the Swadeshi movement, or the assured place it was to occupy in all national demonstrations Dante, when he sang of Italian unity, had no conception of the practical use to which his song would be put by Mazzini and Garibaldi, or the part it would play in the political evolution of the Italian people Men of genius scatter their ideals

¹ Ronaldshay, *The Heart of Aryāvarta*, p 86 In Chap X, he discusses Ānandamath in detail. See also Verney Lovett, *History of the Indian Nationalist Movement*, pp 62-63

² G T Garratt, *An Indian Commentary*, p. 136

³ *India*, p 118

⁴ J D. Anderson in the *Modern Review*, January, 1919, p 21.

⁵ O'Malley, *History of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa*, p 500

⁶ *Bankim Kāhīnī* (in *Jībānī*), p 52

broadcast. Some of them fall on congenial soil. Time and the forces of time nurse them. They ripen into an abundant harvest fraught with unspeakable good to future generations.”¹ Surendranath Banerjea was probably ignorant of Bankimcandra’s own expectations regarding the influence of his song, which were more than realised in Bengal, in the early years of the present century. If Bankimcandra had written only *Anandamath* and nothing else, it would have been sufficient to keep his name alive for ever and give him an honoured place among India’s great sons.

¹ A Nation in Making, p. 206

CHAPTER XV

DEBĪ CAUDHURĀNĪ

Plot

Brajeśvar, son of Haraballabh, a Kulīn zamīndar, had three wives—Praphulla, Nayantānā and Sāgar. Praphulla was not allowed to live in her husband's house as an unfounded scandal was attached to her mother's name. One day Praphulla came to her husband's house being hard pressed by poverty, but her father-in-law would not allow her to stay there. She met her husband through the help of her co-wife Sāgar and Brajeśvar gave her a ring when they parted. Praphulla then returned to her mother's house. After her mother's death she lived alone. Durlabh Cakravartī, a zamīndar's naib, one night kidnapped her with the help of a woman, Phulmanī and as the naib's men were conveying her elsewhere, they abandoned her on the way on account of a false alarm of robbers. Praphulla was left alone in the woods. Ultimately she found a ruined building in the jungle, where an old Vaiṣṇava was living. She nursed him in his last hours and he left all his wealth to her. Bhabānī Pāthak, leader of a band of robbers, came across her and trained her to be the queen of the robbers. Praphulla assumed the name of Debī Caudhurānī. In the meantime Braja's father was hard pressed for money. Braja's father-in-law refused to help him and on his way back, the followers of Debī Caudhurānī

stopped his boat and transferred him by force to her boat. There Debī's companion Nīśi and Dibā and Braja's wife Sāgar played some pranks with him. Braja was given a loan of the required sum of money by Debī Caudhurānī and the ring he had given to Praphulla. It was then he understood that Debī Caudhurānī was none other than his wife, whom he had thought dead. Haraballabh instead of paying back the loan arranged with the Collector of Rungpore to have Debī Caudhurānī arrested. He accompanied Lt Brenan, who was sent for that purpose. Braja came to meet Debī Caudhurānī as promised. She herself was ready to surrender when she heard about the plot of Haraballabh. But Braja said that he would take her back as his wife. She then captured Lt Brenan by a ruse. Haraballabh was also captured. A storm separated Debī Caudhurānī's boat from the boats of the English soldiers. Lt Brenan was then released. Haraballabh was sent back home on condition that his son would have to marry Nīśi's supposed sister. In the guise of the sister of Nīśi, Debī Caudhurānī returned to her husband's house. Later on everybody knew that she was Praphulla.

Debī Caudhurānī was published in 1831.¹ In the preface, Bankimchandra said that between the Debī Caudhurānī of his novel and the historical Debī Caudhurānī, there was very little connection. Sir W. W. Hunter in his *Statistical Account of Bengal* gives an extract from a report on the district of

¹ *Bhabini Pāṭha* (1900) by Kṛṣṇānāth Dasgupta, a sequel to *Debī Caudhurānī*, retains some of the original characters, but is far from interesting.

Rungpore by the Collector, Mr. Glazier (1873): " In 1787, Lt. Brennan was employed in this quarter against a notorious leader of dakaitis (gang robbers), named Bhawani Pathak. He despatched a native officer, with twenty-four sepoy, in search of the robbers, who surprised Pathak, with sixty of his followers, in their boats. A fight took place, in which Pathak himself and three of his lieutenants were killed, and eight wounded, besides forty-two taken prisoners. Pathak was a native of Bajpur and was in league with another noted dakait, named Majnu Shah, who made yearly raids from the Southern side of the Ganges. We catch a glimpse from the Lieutenant's report of a female dakait, by name Debi Chaudhurani, also in league with Pathak. She lived in boats, had a large force of barkandazs in her pay, and committed dakaitis on her own account, besides receiving a share of the booty obtained by Pathak. Her title of Chaudhurani would imply that she was a zamindar, probably a petty one, else she need not have lived in boats, for fear of capture." ¹ This account was obviously the basis of Bankimcandra's *Debi Caudhurānī*.

The background of the novel is a very dark period in the history of Bengal. The East India Company was ruling Bengal as the representative of the titular Nawab at Murshidabad and Warren Hastings was at the helm of affairs in Calcutta. The notorious Debi Singh whose misdeeds Burke so eloquently condemned was in charge of the revenues of the North Bengal

¹ Vol. VII, pp 158-59.

districts¹ Dacoity was a common occurrence in those days and it occupies also a large space in this novel.² In *Debī Caudhurānī*, Phulmanī and Durlabh ran away in fear of dacoits. Bankimcandra had in mind his own encounter with dacoits on one occasion and he could not resist the temptation of providing some humour at the cost of Durlabh, who exhibited such cowardice before a woman.³

In the character of Praphulla, Bankimcandra has emphasised the view that there is no better life for a married woman than sharing it with her husband. Praphulla said to Nīśī, "The ornament of a woman is her husband."⁴ When she met her husband as a captive in her own boat she broke down completely. Nīśī truly remarked about Praphulla's leadership: "Such things are not for women. If women have to follow that path, they have to be like me. My, Brajeśvar and the lord of Baikuntha are one and the same. There is no human Brajeśvar to make me weep"⁵ The disciplined life of Praphulla under Pāthak's tutelage could not make her forget her true position as a wife. When Nīśī told Praphulla that Śrīkrṣṇa was her husband, Praphulla said, "You have not had a husband. Therefore you speak in that way. If you had one, you would not have been satisfied with Śrīkrṣṇa"

¹ Speech at the Impeachment of Warren Hastings, Vol I, pp 213-33

² O'Malley, History of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa under British Rule, pp 208-9

³ Bankim Jilānī, pp 179-80 Cf. Gaṇapati's flight in fear of ghosts, in *Durgānāṭhī*, Pt I, Ch XV

⁴ *Debī Caudhurānī*, Pt II, Ch XI

⁵ *Ibid*, Pt II, Ch VIII

Bankimcandra's own view was, "If love is pure, the husband is the first step to the attainment of God."¹ Praphulla told Bhabānī Pāthak that such life as she was leading did not suit her. She did not think that any good lay in a life of lawlessness. She felt that she had no right to a life of renunciation. Her true place was in the family and not outside it. The finest qualities of a woman can never show themselves except in family life. Praphulla said to Sāgar, "This is woman's true function. To rule is not her calling. The difficult life is the life of the family. No system of *Yoga* is more difficult than this. We have to deal always with many uneducated, selfish and inexperienced people. It is our business to see that all of them are happy. What penance is more difficult than that? What deed is of greater merit than this?"² Praphulla was no selfish wife. She would not risk the lives of her followers for the sake of her husband when the English attacked her boat. He was her husband, but who was he to her followers?³ Forsaken by her husband, she harboured no bitter thoughts about him. As Debī Caudhurānī, she was a leader of men, rich and powerful. But in her lonely moments, she certainly longed to be the devoted wife of her husband, helping him and serving him. The trappings of queenly splendour could not make her happy. To her Brajeśvar was a divinity on earth and as fitting reward for all of her misfortunes, the author reunites her to him.

¹ *Ibid*, Pt I, Ch XIII

² Debī Caudhurānī, Pt III, Ch XIII

³ *Ibid*, Pt III, Ch IV

Brajeśvar was an obedient son. His father and the society to which he belonged were against Praphulla. He consoled himself with the Hindu teaching that to the son the father was heaven and religion, and in the father's pleasure the gods were pleased. It may be said that Braja had no personality of his own and was too docile a son. But it should be said in his favour that he was brought up in an environment which taught him to obey his parents implicitly. He could not allow his father to be degraded in society for his own happiness. It was only when he was sure that he could boldly face his father that he agreed to the stratagem of his marriage with a supposed *Kulīn* woman. He said, "Can there be any double dealing with one's father?.. If I cheat my father, then I shall have no compunction in cheating others" ¹ Therefore he decided to make a candid confession of everything to his father. He did not forsake Praphulla when she was beset with the danger of being arrested by the English. As his wife he could forsake her a hundred times, but as she was under his guardianship it was his duty to stand by her. ² He had received a rude shock when Sāgar told him that Debī Caudhurānī was Praphulla. Braja could not think of her in league with robbers. He had too high a notion of her ³ His manliness saved everything at the end. Praphulla understood that Brajeśvar was not a man to take up any responsibility unless he could discharge it. ⁴

¹ Debī Caudhurānī, Pt. III, Ch. X

² *Ibid.*, Pt. III, Ch. III

³ Debī Caudhurānī, Pt. II, Ch. IX.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Pt. III, Ch. X

Braja was also a witty person. He enjoyed many combats of wit with his aged grand-aunt¹. But he carried his gallantry too far in the boat of Debī Candhurānī and was taught a sharp lesson by his wife Sāgar, whom he had once insulted². As a *Kulin* husband his was not an enviable life, but when Praphulla came back there was happiness for him.

Braja's father Haraballabh was an avaricious and treacherous man. He was the typical cringing renegade who lived upon the favour of others by doing for them all their dirty jobs. He was such a coward that he began to weep when Braja slapped Lt. Brenan's cheeks. Lt. Brenan is a type of those Europeans who have an exaggerated sense of racial superiority. He said to one of Debī's lieutenants, "How dare a Bengali hang an Englishman?"³

As for the anarchism of the type practised by Bhabānī Pāthak and his followers, Bankimcandra's idea was that what they regarded as service to others was nothing but oppression. In his opinion, if God did not punish the evil-doer, the ruler was to do it. The robbers could serve peace-loving people by giving money to the poor and similar other ways, but the punishment of the wicked was to be left in the hands of a superior power⁴. To dispense justice is the function of the ruler. If that function is usurped by some one else, the will of God is nullified. Human society accepts the rule of a competent person or group of persons so that impartial justice may be distributed.

¹ *Ibid.*, Pt. I, Ch. V

² *Ibid.*, Pt. II, Ch. VI

³ Debī Candhurānī, Pt. III, Ch. IX

⁴ *Ibid.*, Pt. III, Ch. XI.

If the individuals constituting society begin to exercise that function, the very foundations of the social order are shaken.

Of two beautiful descriptions of Bengali life in the villages found in this novel one is Braja's visit to the house of his father-in-law ¹ The other is the ceremony of welcoming a new bride ² Such events are of great importance in village life and though the first one (the visit of a son-in-law) has become less important than before on account of economic reasons, the second (the arrival of a new bride) still creates a good deal of interest among Bengali women. These two chapters are good illustrations of Bankimcandra's powers of careful observation and graphic description

In this novel Bankimcandra spoke of "niskāma dharma." ³ What he meant was that desire was not bad but it must be such that other people should be taken into consideration. Action should be undertaken for the good of others and not for one's personal benefit or gain. This "niskāma" has been well explained by a recent authoritative writer on Indian Philosophy. "Naiskarmya, or abstention from action, is not the true law of morality, but niskāmatā or disinterestedness .. . All desires are not bad. The desire after righteousness is divine. Service of humanity is worship of God. To work desirelessly and impersonally for the sake of the world and God does not bind us The Gītā does not ask us to abhor the common

¹ Ibid, Pt. I, Ch. II

² Ibid, Pt. III, Ch. XII

³ Debi Caudhurānī, Pt. I, Ch. XVI

business of life, but demands the suppression of all selfish desires.”¹ Other teachings from the *Gītā* which Bañkimcandra discussed in this novel are that there is no greater religious virtue than humility, that the senses must be controlled and that the ultimate result of all actions must be left in the hands of God. Bhabānī Pāṭhak taught Praphulla that God lived in all creatures as the *Gītā* says and she should distribute gifts to all living creatures.² Later on in *Sītārām*, Bankimchandra resumed similar discussions on religious matters and critics of literature rightly think that Bankimcandra, the religious preacher, clouded the art of Bankimcandra, the novelist³

¹ S Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol I, pp 568-69
Bankimcandra explains this idea in Dharmatattva, Ch XIV

² “He who seeth Me everywhere, and seeth everything in Me, of him will I never lose hold, and he shall never lose hold of Me.

He who, established in unity, worshippeth Me, abiding in all beings, that Yogī liveth in Me, Whatever his mode of living.

He who, through the likeness of the Self, O Arjuna, seeth equality in everything, whether pleasant or painful, he is considered a perfect Yogī”—The Bhagavad Gita, Tr Mrs. Besant and Bhagavan Das pp 123-24

³ Prabāsī, Vol XXXI, Pt I, p 806

CHAPTER XVI

SĪTĀRĀM

Plot.

Sītārām Rāy, a zamindar, had three wives Śrī, Nandā and Ramā. Śrī lived with her mother and her brother Gaṅgārām, as Sītārām's father objected to her living with her husband on the ground of certain astrological calculations which foretold that she would be the cause of the death of one dear to her. Gaṅgārām was ordered by the Muhammadan Kazi to be buried alive for insulting a Muhammadan *fakīr*. Śrī prevailed upon Sītārām to come to her brother's help. Sītārām's intercession on behalf of Gaṅgārām failed and ultimately Sītārām had to rescue him by force. Sītārām, who had met Śrī after a long time then proposed that she should live with him. She refused to do so when she learnt the reason of her separation from him. Sītārām gradually became a powerful zamindar and founded a new town. During his absence in Delhi, where he had gone to see the Emperor, the Nawab's fauzdar decided to attack Sītārām's town. Ramā became afraid when she heard about the plans of the fauzdar and secretly asked Gaṅgārām to look after the safety of the place. Gaṅgārām was enamoured of Ramā and promised the fauzdar to surrender the town on condition that Ramā should be given to him as a reward. After her parting from her husband, Śrī went on a pilgrimage to the Jagannāth temple at Puri. On her way, she met a Vaiṣṇavī Jayantī, who

initiated her into Vaisnavism. Śrī and Jayantī returned to Sītārām's town the very day that it was attacked by the fauzdar Gangārām did not do anything to save the place. Fortunately Sītārām arrived there just in time to drive the Muhammadans back. Gangārām was allowed to leave the country on Śrī's intervention after he had been indicted in open court and punishment ordered for his dastardly conduct. Ramā was suspected of infidelity, but she proved her innocence. From this time Sītārām, instead of looking after his administrative work, sought Śrī's company and so disorders arose in his territories. Jayantī to divert Sītārām's mind removed Śrī elsewhere. Thus incensed Sītārām so much that he tried to insult Jayantī publicly. He gradually went astray. Ramā died brokenhearted as Sītārām neglected her. The Muslims again attacked Sītārām and in the fight that ensued, his general Mrnmay was killed. Śrī and Jayantī helped Sītārām to convey Nandā and the children to some place of safety. Sītārām's kingdom was destroyed by the Muslims and Śrī and Jayantī vanished.

Sītārām was published in 1887. A second edition followed in 1888 and changes were made in some of the chapters.

Sītārām actually was an historical person, but in his novel Bankimcandra has not been particular about historical truth. Those interested in the history of Sītārām should read Westland's *A Report of the District of Jessore*¹ and Stewart's *History of Bengal*.² As described in the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*,

¹ pp 25-38,

² pp 414-16

Sītārām " was a talukdar in a village called Harihar-nagar on the bank of the Madhumati river, and is said to have been deputed by the Nawab of Dacca to collect his revenues, but as the revenues never went further than Sītārām himself, the Nawab sent an army against him and at length succeeded in capturing him about the year 1712 " ¹ The *Imperial Gazetteer* probably meant the Nawab of Murshidabad when it wrote the Nawab of Dacca. According to Westland Sītārām poisoned himself. Stewart's account of the end of Sītārām that he was impaled alive with his accomplices and the women and children were sold as slaves, is disbelieved by Westland, who thinks that this version of Stewart was based on sources which depreciate Sītārām. The historical Sītārām must have been a quite ordinary person but Bankimchandra has surrounded him with idealism and romance.

Sītārām possessed some of the qualities which make a leader. But he had grave faults as well. His first fault was that he submitted to the superstitious belief of his father and discarded Śrī. When he saw her again after several years, she had grown into a beautiful woman and he wanted her. It was not out of pure disinterestedness that he asked Śrī to come back to him. He had two other wives. Nandā was devoted to him, but she could not inspire him. ² Rāmā was of a nagging disposition. Śrī's beauty appeared to him as something new. He thought that she would make him a good wife. It was not real love, but incre

¹ Vol. XIV, pp. 92-93. Also *Prasanga Sam, 1-v-2, KOT B. Y.*

² *Sītārām, P. I, Ch. X.*

bankering for novelty. For a time they did not see each other as Śrī went away to Orissa. But after her return, his mind became so full of thoughts of her that he forgot his duties as a ruler. He could no longer be a leader of men. The moral responsibility for his downfall rested with Śrī. Sītārām forgot that satisfaction of the senses except for right purposes was sinful.¹ His constructive work came to ruin completely. The character of Sītārām illustrates the teachings of the *Gītā* that contemplation of the objects of sense makes man attached to them and gradually he is led to ruin. Therefore full control over the senses is necessary for happiness in life.²

The three wives of Sītārām represent three different types. Śrī was devoted to Sītārām in a way. In her conversation with Jayantī, Śrī said, "Devotion to the husband is the only virtue of woman ...I do not know God but I know my husband... .I do not want God in preference to my husband. Between the sorrow that I have to bear through living apart from my husband and the happiness that I shall have in the attainment of God, I prefer the grief of separation."³ Śrī regarded her husband as a divinity. If she had lived with him, the

¹ Sītārām Pt III, Ch VII

² "Man, musing on the objects of sense, conceiveth an attachment for these, from attachment ariseth desire; from desire anger cometh forth; from anger proceedeth delusion, from delusion confused memory, from confused memory the destruction of Reason, from destruction of Reason he perishes. But the disciplined self, moving among sense objects with senses free from attraction and repulsion mastered by the Self, goeth to Peace." The *Bhagavad Gītā*, Tr. Besant and Das, pp. 51-52, Baṅkim-candra, *Collected Works*, Vol. III, pp. 81-83, S. N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 498.

³ Sītārām, Pt. I, Ch XIV.

sense of nearness might have lessened the ardour. For a time there was a conflict between her love for her husband and a life of renunciation. She did more harm to Sitārām in refusing to share his responsibilities. Śrī was not like Bhramar,¹ nor was she like Sūryamukhi² She did not belong to the class of ideal wives described by Bankimcandra in one of his essays.³ The ideal of "niskāṁ karma," which was explained to Śrī by Jayantī, was another teaching from the *Gītā* which Bankimcandra stressed in this novel.⁴ But Śrī misunderstood, or rather failed to observe the teaching imparted to her. The ruin of Sitārām's career was partly due to Śrī's failure to fulfil her duties in life. The *Gītā* truly says,

" . . . none shall come
By mere renouncements unto perfection " ⁵

Ramā was full of love for her husband, but she was often in tears even over trifling matters. "It is not merely reciprocal love that constitutes conjugal happiness," says Bankimcandra, "but it is also oneness of purpose and sympathy for each other." ⁶ Nandā did not take the slightest interest in her

¹ Kṛṣṇaśānter Utl, Pt II, Ch IX

² Bṛāhṃṣa, Ch XXXVIII

³ Collected Works, Vol I, p 701

⁴ "He who performeth a prescribed action, saying, 'It ought to be done,' O Arjuna, relinquishing attachment and also fruit, that relinquishment is regarded as pure." The Bhagavad Gita, Tr. Prasad and Das, p 278, also cited, pp 57-59

⁵ Edwin Arnold, The Song Celestial, p 23

⁶ Sitārām, Pt I, Ch X

husband's activities. Her greatest ambition was to die with him. To her Sītārām symbolised religion. No one was more sorry than Nandā when he was rushing headlong to disaster. But she did not possess the courage or capacity to guide him. Once only she rose to the occasion, when she saved Jayantī from disgrace ¹. When Sītārām intended to abandon Rāmā, Nandā reminded him of his duties and said, "Will you forsake one who is faultless without any trial? Is this your royal virtue? Will you do it because Rāmcandra did it? But he was the full Brahmin" ². Nandā could never forgive her husband's neglect of Rāmā, which ultimately led to her death. Still, Nandā was the best wife to Sītārām among the three.

In *Ānandamath*, *Rājśimha* and *Sītārām*, Bankimchandra's purpose was to preach the gospel of patriotism. The most eloquent note in this novel is his intense love for Hinduism. When Śrī's brother was accused before the Kazi, she said to Sītārām, "Who will protect the Hindu except a Hindu?" ³. To the Kazi, Sītārām said about Gangārām, "He is related to me more closely than a brother, than a son, because he has taken shelter with me. It is one of the tenets of the Hindu scriptures that at the cost of one's life, at the cost of all that one has got, the person who seeks shelter has to be protected" ⁴.

This novel was written during the renaissance of Hinduism in Bengal when a new interpretation was

¹ *Ibid*, Pt III, Ch XVIII

² *Ibid*, Pt III, Ch I

³ *Sītārām*, Pt I, Ch II

⁴ *Ibid*, Pt I, Ch IV

being given to the religion by several distinguished people. Bankimcandra's deep veneration for Hinduism is further seen in this novel from his description of the sculptural remains of Orissa and the pride that he takes in his birth as a Hindu¹. But Bankimcandra chose a rather poor subject for his story. If it were his intention to show the greatness of the Hindus, he should have written a story about the achievement of something great instead of a story which is one of sheer destruction. Sītārām appealed to Bankimcandra's imagination as the last remarkable Hindu zamindar of Bengal who dared to revolt against the Muslim power. The subject certainly handicapped the author, but this much can be said in his favour that he made some amends for his choice of the subject-matter by the note of love for his country's civilisation and culture, which is present to such a large extent in this novel.

¹ *Ibid*, Pt I, Ch XIII

CHAPTER XVII

BANKIMCANDRA : SOME ASPECTS OF HIS MIND AND ART.

Bankimcandra was something more than a mere story-teller and in his novels there are various aspects of his thought, which deserve more than cursory attention. Long before his death he was recognised as a great force in the country. A contemporary journal observed, "Babu Bankim Chandra Chatterji is the first Bengali author of the day. He is now a great power, a great educating power and we all take leave to doubt whether he or our schools and colleges shape modern Bengali childhood and youth more effectively and decisively He is the man of most national importance in the country just now." ¹ This encomium he well deserved.

The world that Bankimcandra has created is peopled with a variety of men and women. But he regards them all from one standpoint. Bankimcandra always hopes for the best. In life there are clouds and sunshine, laughter and tears, smiles and sighs. But he asks with the poet, "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" He believes in fate, yet he is no disbeliever in the possibilities of human effort. He does not allow his characters to wait for opportunities to turn up; he makes them create opportunities for themselves. Chance plays a strong part in the

¹ Calcutta Review, 1887, p. xxiv.

lives of many of his characters, but mere chance is not everything. The characters have their own initiative also. At times chains of circumstance enmesh them, but they find some way of escape out of their difficulties. Those that cannot do so are sacrificed on the cruel altar of destiny, or by whatever name one may choose to call it.

Cynicism finds no place in his writings. The morbidity which disfigures the writings of many modern Bengali novelists is conspicuously absent in Bankimcandra's writings. His was a healthy and vigorous mind, keenly alert to all that was happening round him and enthusiastic about everything conducive to human welfare. He was no pessimist brooding over human follies and foibles. Nor was it his intention to try to fashion a new world of imagination, where men and women could take shelter from the everyday affairs of the world. He believed that virtue would triumph over vice, that true love would find a way, that wrong-doers would be punished and that in sacrifice and service to others there was happiness.

He did not regard human beings as perfect, they to him were mere men and women, possessing the merits and defects of their species. He has not singled out one particular man or woman as the epitome of all virtues or the embodiment of all vices. Man to him is no divinity. Neither is woman a heavenly creature. If she has her gracious qualities, she has also her inevitable shortcomings. Out of varied human qualities Bankimcandra made his men and women. Can we say that they are flawless and perfect? Can it be said about them that they are ideal characters? About some

of them that much can be said that they were not the main which might be regarded as the chief point of human perfection. But even then there is another thing of the world that is the main. We have a condition which betokens their unity with the rest of the world. And, they would be lifted into a world like no other. It is not lifeless creation or mere empty form. It is a living being. Bunkurcandra has people in his story of fiction. In his writing, one finds men and women of the blood, men and women who are possible to meet in real life. It is true that there is a point of divergence between the world of the novel and the world of the real life. It is not due to any attempt at an out of unity. The character in a novel ought to have some relation to the real life. The novelist deals with human person. He cannot certainly make it his business to create life which never is nor can ever be. It was to real life that Bunkurcandra went for his material, yet he was no realist in the sense that some of the modern novelists are.

He portrayed life with history as the background in some of his novels. But the historical interest rarely dominated the art of the novelist. He was an accomplished scholar and could describe historical times with picturesque taste and accuracy. But he fully realised the difference between fiction and history. Therefore those who expect to find merely a fastidious antiquarian with a profound reverence for the past only and an intense relish for historical research will be somewhat disappointed in him. There is every reason to believe that he was acquainted with what

Lytton wrote in the preface to the *Last Days of Pompeii* "The intuitive spirit which infuses antiquity into ancient images is perhaps the true learning"¹ In one of his novels Bankimcandra said, "The novelist should be concerned with the elucidation of the inner meaning of events—it is needless to keep any connection with history"² A distinguished critic remarks, "Too great attention to veracity and propriety of detail is very apt to stifle the story by overlaying it"³ Bankimcandra regarded the novel as a serious type of literary work He once wrote to a friend, "The Novel is to me the most difficult work of all, as it requires a good deal of time and undivided attention to elaborate the conception and to subordinate the incidents and characters to the central idea"⁴

He differed from Rameścandra Datta in whose novels history comes first and life occupies a secondary position Rameścandra had the mind of the historian, Bankimcandra the mind of the artist To the former the characters were part of history, to the latter history was part of human life Bankimcandra regarded history as something quite important and deplored the fact that Bengal had no real history⁵ But he made no fetish of history in his novels He saw that the best way to inspire a taste for history in the minds of those for whom he was writing would be the presentation of historical incidents and persons

¹ 1834 Preface

² *Satya, Iti Ha Chitra*

³ *Satya, Iti Ha Chitra*, vol. II, p. 25

⁴ *Satya, Iti Ha Chitra*, vol. II, p. 27

⁵ *Satya, Iti Ha Chitra*, vol. II, p. 27

combined with men and women from his own imagination. It was that method which critics like to call "uniting the really historical with the imaginary" ¹ In the atmosphere of history he never lost the perspective of the novelist. Full freedom was therefore allowed by him to the characters to develop themselves. Ramechandra's novels give one the impression that they are mere history in the garb of novels and that the characters in them are secondary things. The historian in him superseded the novelist, while Bankimchandra could keep himself above the temptation of merely recording historical events. The gift of story-telling and an intimate knowledge of more than one epoch of history are two of the necessary qualifications of the historical novelist ² Bankimchandra possessed both these requisites.

Bankimchandra voiced in his writings some of the most outstanding thoughts and ideas of that age in Bengal. It has been remarked by a recent writer on the Novel, "The very nature of the novelist's art binds him to the present with bonds that other writers are free from. He is first an observer, then a recorder. He must be not only in the world, but of it, for how else should he gain the sympathy and understanding without which all his art is vain? If his thought ranges far beyond that of his contemporaries, if his sensibility is painfully keener than theirs, and if his conduct breaks through most, or even many, of their

¹ A. S. G. Canning, *History in Fact and Fiction*, p. 245

² *The Forum*, 1897-98, Vol. XXIV, *The Historical Novel*; cf., what Scott said in the advertisement to the first edition of the *Antiquary*, *Introductions, Notes and Illustrations, etc.*, Vol. I, p. 188

well-established conventions, he will probably turn poet or philosopher, mystic or revolutionary, and almost certainly he will discontinue writing novels

But if, as nearly always is the case, he remains in essentials a man of his time, the prevailing thought and temper of his time will determine the spiritual quality of his work"¹

The times in which Bankimcandra lived were marked by intellectual ferment in Bengal. The rebellious intellectual freedom of the students of the Hindu College, the "Young Bengal" spirit, though it gave to Bengal a number of men of ability and merit, had too much of unrest in it to please Bankim. To pull down the old order was the motto of "Young Bengal"². Its interest was not so much constructive. Bankimcandra came at a time when the first outbursts of this spirit were practically over. Men who had been shaken off their balance had had time to regain their mental equilibrium. The storm had come and passed leaving behind it doubts and uncertainties and out of these a new order had to be created. Between too much of anglicism and too much of conservatism a compromise had to be made. In society, in religion, in culture, a new foundation had to be laid for a better order of things to take the place of the existing chaos, and Bankimcandra was one of those who applied themselves to that responsible task. It was through literature that he could render his best service. In the practical

¹ I. Caruthers, *Shelton and the Future of the English Novel*, pp. 31-32.

² *Works of Shelley*, Charles D. Y. Vol. IV, p. 2. Reprinted from, ed. by Sir Roger L. Lytton, Ch. IV, C. 1 A.

field of religious or social reform, or in matters of educational and political advancement, he could have done little even if he had chosen to attempt it. Through literature he could reach all sections of his countrymen—those that read for pleasure and those that read for profit

The literary renaissance in Bengal in the last century was ushered in by those who had fully understood and assimilated foreign influences¹ Rājā Rāmmohan Rāy, Aksaykumār Datta, Īśvarcandra Vidyāsāgar, Michael Madhusūdan Datta, Bankimcandra were profoundly influenced by Western culture Bankimcandra looked to his country's cultural heritage for inspiration, while deriving at the same time material from his knowledge of Western culture "We are disciples of the West," he stated emphatically on more than one occasion² He had a high regard for his country's culture, but it never for a moment made him a narrow-minded patriot It was not his principle to raise his country or society to a great height by disparaging other countries and societies.³ Therefore he could easily accept the best in the culture of the West with the same amount of enthusiasm as he felt for Indian culture He did not forget that he was an Indian, but he remembered also that he was a man living in the second half of the nineteenth century, at a time when the West was exerting a strong influence on the Indian mind

¹ Coomaraswamy, *Art and Swadeshi*, p. 111

² *Collected Works*, Vol. II, p. 541, see also preface to *Gītā* (*Collected Works*, Vol. III)

³ *Dharmatattva*, Pt. I, Anuśilan Ch. XXIV

A prominent note in his novels is his love for his country. But it should never for a moment be assumed that before Bankimcandra there was no feeling of patriotism or nationalism in Bengal. Some years before he made his appearance as a novelist, a Bengali periodical observed, "He who looks idly at the sad state of his country must be an extraordinarily patient man. Such a man . . . is unfit to be called a man."¹ Išvarcandra Gupta in his poems ridiculed many outlandish ideas. Even Madhusūdan Datta, himself a thoroughly anglicised Bengali, on the eve of his departure for Europe, remembered his motherland in a poem, which has since then become a classic. Rangalāl Bandyopādhyāy wrote, "Who wants to live without freedom?" Rājñārāyan Basu and Nabagopal Mitra found an outlet for their activities by promoting national feeling.² The Hindu Mela organised in 1867 by Nabagopal Mitra helped to spread the feeling of patriotism in Bengal.³ Bankimcandra was a thinker and not an active worker like the organisers of the Hindu Mela. He found it most convenient to appeal to nationalistic and patriotic feelings through a popular medium—the novel, and was more successful than many other writers. Although political subjection chafed him he was against all anarchical and revolutionary methods. "Revolutions are very generally processes of self-torture and rebels are suicides," he wrote in the preface to *Īnandamath*.

¹ *Kalkatā Patrikā*, 1858, p. 7.

² Rājñārāyan Basu, *Sādāśiv*, I, p. 70.

³ Rabindranath Tagore, *My Father's House*, pp. 14-15. Bankimcandra's *Īnandamath* (1882) was published in 1882. *Prabodhā*, I, 1 (1882), p. 10.

"To go against the ruler is a great sin," was his opinion in another novel ¹

Bankimcandra had a strong sense of national self-respect ² That was the reason why he could not reconcile himself to the account of the conquest of Bengal by Bakhtyar Khalji with a few horsemen Again and again his mind revolted against such a suggestion and more than once it travelled to the same theme ³ The same bent of mind led him to criticise the attitude of those who think that Western thought is superior in all respects to Indian "You have a misconception that whatever the English think is true, what they do not know is false, beyond human knowledge and impossible Really that is not so . The English know something, our ancestors also knew something What the English know, the sages did not know What they knew, the English have not been able to discover even now "⁴ This does not mean that he was claiming that Indian thought was superior to Western thought He was not blind to the defects in national character One of his characters says that no amount of reproach was sufficient for the Bengalis and they could digest every kind of reproof.⁵ He thought that unless national weaknesses were ruthlessly exposed the race to which he belonged would lag behind in the march to progress Bankimcandra's

¹ Durgēśnandinī, Pt I, Ch VI

² Bibidha Prabandha, Bāṅgālir Bāhubal

³ Collected Works, Vol II, 637, Mr̥āṇinī Pt IV, Chs IV and V, Kamalakantā, pp 158-59

⁴ Rajanī, Pt III, Ch VI

⁵ Kṛṣṇakānter Uil, Pt I, Ch X

criticism was never malicious. He wanted the people to get rid of those drawbacks which sap the vitality of a race and he was never afraid of using the harshest language, the most scathing terms and the most biting satire.¹

Bankimcandra belonged to the period of Hindu revival in Bengal, of which the poetical side is seen in Nabīncandra Sen's works such as *Raibatak*, *Pravās*, *Kuruḥsetra*. The study of the sacred books of the Hindus was a special feature of this movement. In 1887 Satyabrata Sāmaśramī started a Vedic magazine. Rameścandra Datta translated the Vedas into Bengali. Nagendranāth Basu in *Masāri-Rahasya* asserted the superiority of Hindu over European social institutions. Dvijendranāth Thākur wrote a satire on the anglicising influence on Hindu life. Candranāth Basu contended for the superior spirituality of Hinduism as contrasted with Western materialism. Bankimcandra had great faith in Hinduism. But he did not go to any extreme. He adopted a balanced view. By Hinduism he did not mean the worship of innumerable deities. He made this perfectly clear in *Ānandamath*.² The low state to which ritualistic Hinduism had sunk pained him extremely. Once he wrote, "The Hindu who revives his religion is happy and worthy among men."³

It is not clear under what religious influences he came in his own life. Rīmkīṣṇa Paramahansa was a contemporary of his and Bankimcandra used to visit

¹ Kamalākṣitar Patra, Ch. III. Collected Works, Vol. III, p. 157, p. 693.

² Pt. IV, Ch. VIII.

³ *Satya-Bodhi*, Pt. II, Ch. XVI.

him.¹ But it is doubtful if Rāmkrṣṇa actively influenced Bankimcandra. Moreover, Rāmkrṣṇa was a Śākta and a worshipper of Kālī, while Baṅkimcandra was attracted to the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the teachings of Śrīkrṣṇa. Remaining outside the pale of the Hindu revivalists, he was one of the pioneers in the study of Hinduism and had a great deal to do with the publication of a series of works on Hinduism edited by Rameścandra Datta. Bankimcandra intended to translate parts of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Gītā* for this series but he died after translating the first two chapters of the *Gītā*. The general idea behind his works on religion was the unification of the Hindus and the interpretation of Hinduism in its best form.²

The idea of a Hindu political revival is more than once hinted at in his novels. Visionaries like Mādhabācārya and Satyānanda thought that such a revival was possible. Hindu principles and ideals in life and conduct were highly prized by Bankimcandra. Even a woman like Rohini found it impossible to confess her love openly as she belonged to that race whose women died in the fire.³ Mahārānā Rājsimbhā did not like his enemies to die of hunger and said, "The Hindu knows that to supply food to the needy is a great merit. So he does not like even his enemy to die without food."⁴ When Jagat took

¹ Romsin Rolland, *Prophets of the New India*, p. 136.

² *Sāhitya-s-Parīṣat-Patrickā*, 1301 B Y ; Bibidha Prabandha, p. 231—
"That which leads to the welfare of all Hindus is my duty."

³ *Kṛṣṇakānter Uil*, Pt. I, Ch. XII.

⁴ *Rājsimbha*, Pt. VIII, Ch. VIII, Manucci, Vol. II, p. 241, says that the Rana supplied food to the Mughals.

shelter in the Śailesvar temple he said to those who were inside, " If you are women, sleep without anxiety. Not a blade of grass shall hurt your feet so long as the Rājput has the sword and buckler in his hands " After the duel Jagat said to Osmān, " The Rājput is not so ungrateful as to touch the body of one who has done him service " ¹

Bankimcandra was a young man when the social revolution began in Bengal and during his lifetime considerable attempts were made at social reform. He was fully alive to the need of a thorough cleansing of Bengali society from the abuses and malpractices that were prevalent. Though he deals in his novels with social problems, one gets the impression that pictures of social life interested him more than the actual solution of the problems to which he refers. Here again he differed from Rameścandra Datta, whose novels of social life are full of problems typically of his own time. The remarriage of Hindu widows, the problem of the Hindu who received an education in Europe and became a social outcast, intercaste marriage were burning questions in his days. He was much bolder than Bankimcandra in exposing social evils and a stronger advocate of progressive social ideals.

As love is the central pivot on which the main plot rests in most of Bankimcandra's novels, we may appropriately enquire what his ideas on this matter were. He has not propounded a love-philosophy in the sense that Plato and Shelley may be said to have done. Of portraits of love at different stages of

human life, he has given many examples. There is not a single novel of his in which there is not love of some kind or other, be it the love of a man for a woman, the love of the wife for the husband, the love of the young man for the maiden or *vice versa*, the love of the patriot for the country, the love of the idealist for certain ideals. Of love between man and woman Bāṅkimcandra was a very good delineator. He had here a high standard. To him love which arose out of the appreciation of the qualities of a person was of more value than love which grew out of the appreciation of mere beauty.¹

Although Bāṅkimcandra has depicted love as the natural outcome of men and women coming into contact with one another, or arising from other causes such as early companionship, sudden meeting, pity, sympathy, gratitude, he did not think it improper to deal with sex-complications. He was no purist in the sense that in his treatment of love he was handicapped by any stereotyped proprieties. He believed in the primary instincts of human nature. That men and women are susceptible to love or attraction for each other under certain circumstances he fully recognised. Rohinī was a young widow. She was infatuated with Gobindalāl who lowered himself by a liaison with her. It was against all moral and social laws and both had to pay a heavy price for it. Kundanandini fell in love with Nagendranāth, who in his turn had fallen in love with her. It is interesting to note here that in two of Bāṅkimcandra's novels in which there are

¹ Bīṣaṅkṣa, Ch. XXXII. Also Collected Works, Vol I, p 519

actual sex-complications a young widow is the central figure.¹ In Baŋkimcandra's time the girl-widow was a person who might well be the centre of romance, hedged round as she was with many social conventions. She constituted a serious practical problem for Hindu society. Baŋkimcandra found in her a likely character for the novel. Since then Bengali society has broadened to some extent and writers have other materials from which they can draw their plots and characters.

Bankimcandra kept love above the call of the flesh. Yet it was best appreciated by him in the daily life of men and women. Although his ideal was married love and love which culminated in marriage even when it had existed in premarital days, love could exist without marriage, as is shown in the cases of Āyesā and Pratāp. Pratāp's self-sacrifice made the man greater than his love and in Āyesā's self-control the real woman in her came out more fully than the mere lover. But when love exists without marriage in Bankimcandra's novels it is generally onesided. True it is that Saibalini and Pratāp loved each other, but Jagat did not reciprocate Āyesā's feelings. Nor did Labanga make it quite clear if she loved Amarnāth.

One of the most characteristic points in Bankimcandra's novels is his success with women-characters. Was it due to any poetic idealisation of woman or was it an outcome of the new outlook on woman that is seen in the nineteenth century Bengali literature and is noticed specially in the poetry of Madhusūdan, Rāṅgālāl, Bihārīlāl and Nabīncandra ? Certainly it was not

the influence of Vaisnava poetry in which Kīdhā is so much a creation of poetic fancy. Bankimcandra was not influenced by the soft poetry of Jayadeb in which there is such an abundant description of the charms of woman. In fact he utterly disliked the sensuous poetry of Jayadeb.¹ His knowledge of the psychology of woman helped him to depict her sympathetically and his deep-rooted respect and innate reverence for womankind made him think of woman as "full of forgiveness, kindness and affection, the greatest success of God's creation."² Some of his women embody the best ideals of womanhood and indeed some of them are too faultless. He did not think of women as merely dressed-up dolls. The heroine-like character of Draupadi attracted him more than the bashful and tender heroines in older Indian literature.³ So he depicted brave and self-reliant women, women who could be depended upon and could take risks in life and was successful with characters like Sāntī, Bimalā and Nirmal.

He valued the proper education of women. Though his women were not college-ladies or girls educated in schools, many of them were accomplished. Tilottamā used to read Sanskrit poetry and romance, Bhramar and Dalanī read poetry, Sāntī was educated with boys at a pandit's school, Bhabānī Pāthak supervised Praphulla's education in difficult subjects for several years. Bankimcandra brought many of his women out of the seclusion of the inner apartments and made

¹ Bibidha Prabandha, Vidyāpati o Jayadeb

² Kṛṣṇakānter Ūl, Pt. II, Ch. XV.

³ Collected Works, Vol. I, pp. 795-96

them see what the world outside really was. But he regarded the home as the best place for them and not the outer world.

He realised that women were subjected to excessive social tyranny.¹ Some of his women felt that they were under too much social subjection Bimalā said, "How are they to introduce themselves to others who live in secrecy? Since the day God forbade women to utter the names of their husbands he also closed the way of their introducing themselves."² His women knew their own limitations and confessed so frankly. But at times they were inclined to brag. Labanga said! "What does a man know about family life or about his relatives? His business is to earn money Is man the master of the family?" and again, "What does it matter about a man's opinion? He has the same opinion that a woman has"³ Kulsam says, "I have not seen the man who is able to find out the tricks of woman"⁴ The customary Indian contempt for women was criticised by Bankimcandra in the remark that Foster made to Dalanī: "The people of your country have no respect for the words of women"⁵

Bankimcandra went so far as to disregard even the conventional ideas regarding the parentage of some of his women. Bimalā was not of pure birth, neither

¹ Sāmya, Ch. V. Bāṭkī mraṇḍra pleaded for a better status for women

² Durgā mraṇḍra, Pt. I, Ch. II

³ Labaṅga, Pt. IV, Ch. I

⁴ Candā mraṇḍra, Pt. II, Ch. I

⁵ Rāṇī, Pt. V, Ch. II

was Tilottamā's mother. But Bimalā's love for Birendra was in no way inferior to that of any other woman in Bankimcandra's novels. What he most insisted upon was purity in the character of women. "There is nothing more virtuous in a woman than chastity," was his firm opinion.¹ In society woman holds an important position and so far as her relation to it is concerned she is bound by certain accepted notions. Therefore, Katalu Khān had to vouch for Tilottamā's character. Saibalīnī's character was proved stainless in open *darbar* before Mīr Kāsim. Still Candrasekhar said, "If any atonement is to be done for pleasing people, I shall do it."² A wife must be above all suspicions. But Bankimcandra was equally emphatic in insisting on purity in men as well.³ For a single act of folly in his youth Amarnāth was branded with hot iron as a thief. Debendra, Nagendra, Gobīndalāl suffered for lack of moral restraint.

It is natural that a writer, who preached high ideals of wifehood as we have already seen, should regard marriage as a great and sacred institution.⁴ In Kapālkunḍalā the priest says, "Marriage is woman's only step to religion; even the Mother of the world is wedded to Śiva."⁵ But Baṅkimcandra was not blind

¹ *Mṛgānuṭ*, Pt. III, Ch. VI

² *Candrasekhar*, Pt. VI, Ch. VIII

³ *Cf.* *Collected Works*, Vol. I, p. 857.

⁴ *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 108; *Kamalākānter Daptar*, Ch. V. See also Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, p. 84, and Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, p. 87

⁵ Pt. I, Ch. VIII.

to the causes that often lead to married misery, Kapāl-kundalā's life was unhappy because she did not love her husband. Śaibalīnī at first did not feel anything akin to love for Candraśekhara. Bankimcandra has given certain instances of mixed marriages. Hemcandra's father was as an enemy of Buddhism, while Minālīnī's father was a Buddhist. That fact did not stand in the way of their marriage, but still the marriage had to be kept a secret. Social disparities often cause troubles and stand as barriers against happy married life as in the case of Kulīn Manoramā and Śrotriya Paśupati. Bankimcandra looked with disfavour upon anything that might disrupt the foundations of society, and that was the reason why he did not favour widow remarriage, though he had sympathy for the young widow. But he was definitely opposed to evils like child-marriage.¹ Therefore some of his heroines were made to wait for the men they loved.

Bankimcandra's men can be grouped as heroes, lovers, idealists, thinkers, scholars, though the divisions overlap occasionally. He made his conception of the relation between literature and morality clear in one of his essays. "Poets are the teachers of the world, but they do not teach by propounding morality."² Here by poets he meant literary artists in general. In the portrayal of his men these ideals actuated him and he laid stress on qualities like honesty, sincerity, strength of character and steadfastness of purpose. Although he has exalted physical prowess, to him

¹ *Collected Works*, Vol. II, p. 67-68.

² *Collected Works*, Vol. I, p. 7-8.

moral force was superior to mere physical strength. Birendra would not purchase his freedom at the price of his independence. Pratāp died fighting bravely, but what raises him in our estimation as a man is not his skill with weapons but his strength of mind. Amarnāth did not find in life the happiness that was his due, but his sacrifice of his own happiness for the sake of one, whom he had once loved, makes him superior to many of those who win battles.

Bankimcandra was not fond of weak men who loll in luxury and lead a life of ease and comfort. He believed in work, in action which meant more to him than meditation or silent thinking. He held the ideal of the *anāsakta* karma of the Gītā rather than the ideal of renunciation or asceticism. Therefore even after they had taken the vows of ascetic life Abhirām and Rāmānanda engaged themselves with affairs in which they could be of help to others. They did not seek deliverance from the bonds of life by becoming ascetics. It was by serving others that they sought their salvation.² In one of his essays Bankimcandra says that there are two types of people—those that are inclined to the sensual and those that are inclined to the spiritual. Both were wrong in his opinion.³ But the life of a *sannyasī* was in some cases the inevitable consequence of the career of men who were failures in life. Gobindalal became a *sannyasī*. Nagendranāth wanted to retire from the life of a householder when sick of

¹ Cf. Bibidha Prabandha, p. 150

² See Kṛṣṇacaritra, Pt. I, p. 123, for Bankimcandra's conception of an ideal character

³ Collected Works, Vol. I, p. 790

the world. He was thus shirking his duty. Out of pity for these weak characters Bankimcandra prescribed such a life for them.

A question that often confronts serious students of the novels of Bankimcandra is, "Why are some of his men such miserable failures?" He had no word of praise for the idle, inactive, ease-loving, ambitionless Bengali, the product of climatic conditions in Bengal.¹ Yet, it was with this material that he had to build some of his works. He had no admiration for sentimental heroes like Rāma in Bhababhuti's *Uttararāma-carita*, Rāma who gives vent to feelings which more besit a worthless young man newly fallen in love.² Nabakumār, Nagendranāth, Jibānanda, Sītārām belong to this type of character. Better and more successful delineations are those of Jagat, Rājsimha, Mahendra, Brajeśvar, Candraśekhara. One of the reasons why some of his men were unsuccessful was that the living types before Bankimcandra were regarded by him as poor. He lived in stirring times in the intellectual history of Bengal. Did he not find in the life of his days sufficient materials for convincing men-characters in his novels? He himself said that literature is the reflection of national character.³ It is very likely that he saw too many weaknesses and shortcomings in his contemporaries.

To him the Bengalis were a class of people, who had learnt craftiness from the fox, sycophancy and love of begging from the dog, cowardice from the

¹ *Id.*, Vol. I, p. 72.

² *Id.*, Vol. I, p. 767, 767.

³ *Collected Works*, Vol. I, p. 71.

sheep, imitativeness from the monkey and noisiness from the ass¹ The author who wrote, "He who is a Christian to the Missionary, a Brahmo to Keśab-candra, a Hindu to his father and an atheist to a beggar Brāhmaṇ, is a Babu He who drinks water at home, wine at a friend's house, is abused at a public woman's residence and receives a push by the neck from his European master, is a Babu. He who hates oil at his bath, his own fingers at meals and his mother-tongue during conversation is a Babu,"² could not possibly depict many successful men as his opinions about the people he saw around him were far from high

Rabīndranāth is right in thinking that Bankim-candra has been most successful where he has portrayed the modern Bengali³ In depicting characters of his own rank as Bankimcandra did in those novels where modern Bengali life is the subject-matter, he could draw from a finished model. Rabīndranāth further says that where Bankimcandra tried to picture the old type he has had to invent a great deal A novelist has the advantage of imagination in supplying the leading features of characters belonging to classes and times other than his own But Bankimcandra himself says that the human heart remains the same in every country and age⁴ Some of his characters do not belong to any typical time The same is true of other great writers also Shakespeare's characters are not

¹ *Ibid*, Vol. I, p 802

² *Ibid*, Vol II, p 690

³ *Modern Review*, January, 1917, p 4

⁴ *Collected Works*, Vol I, p 809

typically Elizabethan, nor are some of the characters in Rabindranāth's novels typical representatives of modern Bengali life.

Bankimcandra did not create many good caricatures. The best examples are Gajapati, Tārācaran, Hīrālāl, Debendra, the village post-master in *Kṛṣṇa-kānter Uil* henpecked Rāmsaday, Rāmram's elderly wife, but some of these are very incomplete sketches. They are not such enduring characters like Mrs. Gamp, Micawber, Pickwick and Mr Collins. Bankimcandra lacked to some extent what is known as "fantastic humour" and which Dickens had in plenty.¹ He had his villains but they are not devilish creatures like Iago, Fagin and Bill Sykes. He could not create an unscrupulous adventuress like Becky Sharp. Though Rohini is something of an adventuress she is inferior to Becky. Neither was Bankimcandra able to depict military adventurers like Quentin Durward and D'Artagnan. Gurgan Khan might have been developed into such a character but the novelist did not proceed very far and left Gurgan a mere third rate figure. Similarly he lost another opportunity by merely referring to Dyce Sombre who was the type of those military adventurers, who made India the scene of their activities in the eighteenth century.

In discussing Bankimcandra's style, we have to bear in mind that before his time the learned, pedantic and verbose style was in vogue. Longwinded sentences some of which occupy as much as half a page were common in the writings of Rāmmohan Ray

¹ Cf. *Indian History and Literature*, Vol. XIII, p. 335.

and in periodicals like *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā*. The style of Aksaykumar Datta and Īśvarcandra Vidyāsāgar was not at all suited to prose-fiction. It is fortunate that Bankimcandra did not take as a model the prose style of Īśvarcandra Gupta under whose influence he came in early life. Pyāricāṇḍ and Kalīprasanna had, it is true, written in a more colloquial style, but they did not command a big following. Moreover Bankimcandra considered the style of Hūtom Pyācī poor and the style of Ālāl inappropriate for serious and dignified subjects. He was of opinion that the chief qualities required in good style are simplicity and clarity, but if the colloquial style did not for any reason serve one's purpose, there was no harm in taking recourse to a more difficult style¹. Therefore he adopted a middle course. In his writings there is a combination of the learned and the simpler styles. But he did not fully escape the influence of earlier writers. The opening chapter of *Durgasānandini* is classical in tone.

“৯৯৭ বঙ্গাব্দের নিদাঘশেষে এক দিন একজন অশ্বারোহী পুরুষ বিষ্ণুপুর হইতে গান্ধার্যের পথে একাকী গমন করিতেছিলেন। দিনমণি অস্তাচল-গমনোত্তোগী দেখিয়া অশ্বারোহী দ্রুতবেগে অশ্ব সঞ্চালন করিতে লাগিলেন, কেননা সম্মুখে প্রকাণ্ড প্রাস্তর; কি জানি যদি কালধর্ম্মে প্রদোষকালে প্রবল ঝটিকাবৃষ্টি আরম্ভ হয়, তবে সেই প্রাস্তরে, নিরাশ্রয়ে ষৎপরোনাস্তি পীড়িত হইতে হইবেক। প্রাস্তব পার হইতে না হইতেই সূর্যাস্ত হইল; ক্রমে নৈশ গগন নীল নীরদমালায় আবৃত হইতে লাগিল। নিশারস্তেই এমত ঘোরতর অন্ধকার দিগন্তসংস্থিত হইল যে,

¹ Collected Works, Vol II, p. 670

বড় বড় চোখ—কখন হির, কখন হাসিতেছে। চোঁট ছুখানি পাতলা, রাঙ্গা টুকটুকে, কুলের পাণ্ডুর মত উল্টান, নুখখানি ছোট; সর্কশুদ্ধ বেন একটু ছুঁস্ত ছুঁ। গডন-পিটন কি রকম তাহা ধরিতে পারিলাম না।। আমগাছের যে ডাল কচিয়া বাস, সে ডাল যেমন বাতাসে খেলে, সেই রকম তাহার সর্কাদ খেলিতে লাগিল—বেগন নদীতে ঢেউ খেলে, তাহার শরীরে তেমনই কি একটা খেলিতে লাগিল—আগি কিছু ধরিতে পারিলাম না, তার নুখে কি বেন একটা মাখান ছিল, তাহাতে আগাকে বাছ করিয়া ফেলিল।”

In process of time the style of Bankimcandra underwent certain changes and this is clearly seen in his descriptions of external objects. A comparison of the opening of *Mrnālmī* with the description of the river bathed in moonlight in *Debī Caudhurānī* would be a very good illustration on the point.

“একদিন প্রয়াগতীর্থে, গঙ্গা-যমুনা-সঙ্গমে, অপূর্ণ প্রাবৃট্ দিনান্ত-শোভা প্রকটিত হইতেছিল। প্রাবৃট্ কাল, কিন্তু মেঘ নাই, অথবা যে মেঘ আছে তাহা স্বর্ণময় তরঙ্গমালাবৎ পশ্চিম গগনে বিগাহ করিতেছিল। স্বর্ষ্যদেব অন্তে গমন করিতেছিলেন। বর্ষার জলসংগমে গঙ্গা-যমুনা উভয়েই সম্পূর্ণরূপে, যৌবনের পরিপূর্ণতায় উদ্ভাসিত, বেন ছুই ভগিনী ক্রোড়ান্তে পরস্পরে আলিঙ্গন করিতেছিল। চক্ষু বসনাপ্রভাগবৎ তরঙ্গমালা পবনতড়িত হইয়া কুলে প্রতিধাত করিতেছিল।”

Compare this with the following extract from *Debī Caudhurānī*

“বর্ষাভাগ। অহিভোষমা এখন বড় উজল নয়, বড় নরম, অস্ফর মাথা—পৃথিবীর স্বপ্নের আবরণের মত। ত্রিশোত নদী বা

কালের জলপ্লাবনে কূলে কূলে পরিপূর্ণ। চন্দ্রের কিরণ সেই তীব্রগতি নদীচলের স্রোতের উপর—স্রোতে, আবর্তে, কদাচিত্ ফুড় ফুড় তরঙ্গ স্নিহিতেছে। কোথাও জল একটু ছুটিয়া উঠিতেছে—সেখানে একটু চিকিমিকি; কোথাও চরে ঠেকিয়া ফুড় বীচিভঙ্গ হইতেছে, সেখানে একটু কিকিমিকি। তীরে, গাছের গোড়ায় জল আসিয়া লাগিয়াছে—গাছের ছায়া পড়িয়া সেখানে জল বড় অন্ধকার,—অন্ধকারে গাছের ফুল, ফল, পাতা বাহিয়া তীব্র স্রোত চলিতেছে, তীরে ঠেকিয়া জল একটু তর-তর কল-কল পত-পত শব্দ কবিতেছে—কিস্ত সে আধারে আধারে।^১

Bankimchandra followed some of the literary conventions which formed part of the usual stock-in-trade of older Bengali writers. The descriptions of the arrival of Praphulla as a bride and the women's gathering in *Indira* are two of the best examples of the handling of the conventional style in his novels. In his descriptions of feminine beauty also, he was conventional to some extent in his earlier novels. He was rather diffuse in his descriptions of Ayesā, Tilottamā, Manoramā and Matā Bibī.² But gradually he eschewed this elaborate process which he had imbibed from the study of Sanskrit, and substituted brief descriptions instead and was very sparing with words while speaking of Kunda, Dalanī, Śrī, Ramā, Rajanī and Sāgar. The contrast with his earlier style is easily noticed in such cases. It is no longer the style of *Kapāl-lundalā* or *Mṛnālīnī*.

Bankimchandra tried to write now and then colloquial Bengali, but there is here a considerable mixture

¹ Deb, *Chandana*, P. II, Ch. III.

² Cf. *Trilokya*, Pt. I, P. 10; *Chandana*, Pt. I, Ch. VI.

We may turn now to Bankimcandra's management of the plots of his novels. A plot has been described as "the chain of events in a story and the principle which knits it together."¹ The plot "is the novel in its intellectual aspect," says another critic.² Professor Elton says, "The story is the narrative as it moves on, and holds us, from point to point. The plot is the narrative, in its entire web, as we look back upon it"³ Bankimcandra generally divided his novels into several parts ranging from two as in the case of *Durgēśnandini* and *Kṛṣṇakānter Uīl* to eight as in the case of *Rāj-sinḥa*. This he did in order to preserve a coherence in the plot and not to lose a sense of proportion. But there are some novels in which the story runs merely through different chapters and is not divided into parts at all.

The technique of a novelist requires that he should be economical in plot-construction and the plot should be carefully wound up. Unless this is done, there is a feebleness at the end of the story and it is marred by a sense of dullness. Both in *Kṛṣṇakānter Uīl* and *Sītārām* Bankimcandra added appendices and this surely was not an artistic way of concluding a story. The plot of *Kṛṣṇakānter Uīl* would not have suffered in the least from the disappearance of Gobīndalāl and in *Sītārām* the readers ought to have been left to guess the fate of the hero instead of the local gossip that Bankimcandra indulged in.

¹ E. Muir, *The Structure of the Novel*, p. 16

² E. M. Forster, *Aspect of the Novel*, p. 129

³ Sir Walter Scott, pp. 64-65

Stevenson laid down a rather hard rule for the novelist and the story-teller when he said, "The right kind of thing should fall out in the right kind of place, the right kind of thing should follow, and not only the characters talk aptly and think naturally, but all the circumstances in a tale answer to one another like notes in music."¹ This means that the plot of a novel should be artistically compact. Sometimes useless length spoils the plot. The fault of the first part of *Debī Caudhurānī* is that it is too long. The whole thing could have been condensed within a shorter space. The entire episode about the intrigues in Agra and Delhi in *Kapālkundalā* might have been considerably shortened. The intrigues have little to do with the main plot, but the novelist quite unnecessarily devotes several chapters to this part. In *Candraśekhara* again, one whole part is allotted to the depiction of the mental and physical agonies of Saibalini. The fact that many of Bankimcandra's novels first appeared in a serial form may have tempted him to drag them out to an unnecessary length. He himself felt it necessary to rewrite some of his novels after they have been published in a serial form and in others he made considerable alterations. It may be said that Tolstoy's *War and Peace* or Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga* are long novels. But they are chronicle novels and therefore stand on an altogether different plane.

In some of his novels Bankimcandra set himself to please his readers by a happy ending of the story, and in trying to do so he sometimes spoiled the beauty of the plot. The plot of *Mr. Mohan* is rather thin and only

the depiction of some of the characters redeems it from being mediocre. The plot of *Rajanī* is somewhat sordid. Labangalātā's character loses its charms because the novelist was intent on seeing Rajanī married to Sacīndra, and so he made Labanga play upon Amar-nāth's early love for her. In *Debī (Caulhurāṇī)* Bankimcandra had to reunite Praphulla to her husband in spite of her years of leadership of Bhabānī Pāthak's gang of robbers. There is a sense of making too much fuss which ultimately leads to nothing. The propagandist made the novelist ineffectual.

It is really in the handling of the tragic plot that Bankimcandra showed most skill. The tragedies of Āyesā and Osmān, of Kunda and Nagendra, the tragedy of Zebunnisa and Mabārak, of Sītārām and Srī, the tragedy of Bhramar and Gobīndalāl, appealed more to the novelist's imagination than those themes to which he could give a happy ending. He made Nagendranāth and Sūryamukhī happy at last. But at what cost? Kunda had to kill herself and Sūryamukhī had to suffer intensely. Bankimcandra made Saibalinī go back to Candraśekhar. But it was a merely patched-up affair. The novelist had to enlist the aid of the *yoga* or psychic force in making Saibahnī love her husband. It was certainly not a normal course. The novelist shows much more skill in *Kapālkuṇḍalā* where the heroine is not in love with the man to whom she was married. They could not continue to live in that way for a long time and the inevitable crash came. There is a definite reason why Bankimcandra preferred a tragic plot above others. He thought that the best qualities in human nature showed themselves when a

person was placed in unhappy circumstances.¹ So to him Desdemona was a greater character than either Śakuntalā or Māndā.²

In Bankimcandra's art as a novelist there are certain other factors which have to be taken into consideration. He introduced political events to enhance the complexity of some of his plots. Minālīnī's fate is bound up with the ambitious schemes of Mādhavācārya. Dalanī and Śaibalīnī are entangled in the same political events. Śāntī's married life is wholly bound up with the activities of the Śāntāns. Kalyānī also was pushed into the same environment and for a time was separated from her husband and daughter. The Rājput-Mughal wars delayed Cañcal's marriage. Tilottamā and Jagat could not be happy until the Mughals and Pāthāns had come to terms.

Bankimcandra was equally clever in creating complex situations by ordinary events like Dalanī going to Pratāp's house for shelter and Brajesvar meeting Traphulla after years. A novelist can from such common incidents create something which is of considerable importance to his plots. He has, on the other hand, to adopt at times certain distinctly laid out plans like Śāntī disguising herself as a man and going to the Math, Debi Candhurānī ordering her men to transfer Braja forcibly to her boat. Such artifices are sometimes necessary though they may appear quite unnatural to ordinary observers. In the matter of clearing up the complications in the plots Bankimcandra resorted to a merely mechanical device as has already been seen in the

cases where unfortunate circumstances gave rise to doubts regarding the virtue of some of his women. The use of 'letters' in the novel was another device to lend an additional charm to the plot as well as to create complexity in it sometimes. Dhanī's letter to Gurām was responsible for her misfortune. Burokar's letter to her husband created trouble for both of them. Mati Bibi's letter introduced a new element into Kāpāl-kundilā's life. Another characteristic of Bankimchandra's novels was his fondness for providing most of his women with companions or confidantes, whose actions heighten the interest of the plot and often create new situations. Thus Bimalī played the more active part in *Durgā Śundarī*, while Tilottamī was more or less silent.

According to modern standards of classification, the novels of Bankimchandra may be classified as novels of character, novels of action and dramatic novels. In all these categories the plot has a distinct rôle—in some principal and in some secondary. In modern Bengali novels the plot does not play an important part as many of these are full of ideas and questionings. In Rabīndranāth's *Gorā* or Saratcandra's *Śrīhanta* the plot is so slender that it is merely a peg to hang the novelist's ideas on. The plot is a medley of detached events. Bankimchandra wrote years before many of these ideas were in the air and his pre-eminence over modern Bengali novelists in the matter of plot-construction will readily be acknowledged. Judged on the whole, his novels furnish coherent plots, unity in the story and are true to the facts of life, though as a novelist he was a pioneer.

Bankimcandra's influence on Bengali life and literature has been far-reaching. In the novels of Rameścandra Datta, Dāmodar Mukhopādhyāy, Rabīndranāth Thākur, Manomohan Basu, Candīcaran Sen, Svarnakumārī Debī, Saileścandra Majumdar and in the writings of Akṣaycandra Sarkār, Candrasekhar Mukhopādhyāy, Nabīncandra Sen and a host of others in the last century and in recent times in the historical novels of Haraprasād Sāstri and Rākhāldās Bandyopādhyāy, one finds the literary influence of Bankimcandra. It would not be too much to say that every Bengali novelist in the second half of the nineteenth century was in a sense his disciple. His versatility enabled him to make his mark felt in more than one branch of Bengali literature and Bengali thought. He introduced serious literary journalism and criticism and the high standards that he maintained therein should still serve as lessons to those who desire to win laurels in these branches of literature. He first taught the Bengalis the vast possibilities of Bengali literature by his own novels and miscellaneous works and gave an impetus to the cultivation of *belles lettres* in Bengal. He made it possible for educated Bengalis to realise that their life and literature were inseparably bound up, the one with the other. He suggested to them the idea of applying themselves to the improvement of literature if they wanted to achieve anything in the way of national progress. In that respect he was a nation-builder.

He dominated an age by the sheer strength of his outstanding genius and forceful personality, and his

fashions, as one whose opinions carried considerable weight, as one who should be imitated in his literary methods, as one whose works served as models and standards of excellence. Rabīndranāth maintains that he is still living in the age of Bankimcandra.¹ One section of modern Bengali novelists, specially a group of women writers, draw their inspiration from him. His popularity remains unimpaired inspite of the futile attempts of charlatans and upstarts to relegate him to obscurity.

The Bengali novel in Bankimcandra's hands assumed a fully developed form. His novels were neither imitations of Arabian or Persian tales, nor of the tales of classical Indian writers like Viṣṇuśarmā, Somadeva Bhatta, Bāna, Dandin and Subandhu. Bankimcandra's novels certainly have more affinity with the works of European novelists like Scott, Dumas, Hugo and Lytton. Bankimcandra infused fresh life and breath into forgotten periods of history and made them live again. He created in the minds of many people a new interest for old forgotten things and gave an incentive to the reconsideration of periods of history, which had still then no substantial meaning for the reading public in Bengal. To the modern world many of his novels bring a glimpse of the distant past. Out of the dry bones of history he created men and women, many of whom people now love to recognise as their own kith and kin. But he was not simply content with writing of the past. The sphere of his imagination was not restricted to a narrow circle, he was not oblivious of the currents and cross-currents of life around him

¹ Prabāsi, Vol XXX, Pt I, p 60, Bicetrā, Phālgun, 1336, B Y

Those permanent traits of human nature, which are found in all ages and all climes were the principal materials of his novels

Though essentially a man of his time, he did not find his sole subject-matter in the shortcomings and weaknesses of his contemporaries. Like Thackeray he did not allow himself to be obsessed by *Vanity Fair* nor did the social iniquities of his time engage his chief attention as they did in the case of Dickens. The darkest corners of the human mind found in him a keen observer, though he was not like Dostoevsky primarily concerned with the psychology of crime. Science attracted him, but he discussed no scientific theories in his novels. He did not attempt to portray anything in the nature of a Utopia since life in his days was less complicated and full of problems than it is now. The sombre tragedy of human life attracted him, but the helplessness of man struggling against fate did not deaden his feelings. He could see the "eternal spirit of the chameleon mind" rising above the dull drudgery of human life and be happy in the faith that this indomitable spirit would conquer where the frail flesh often failed.

His lofty idealism never allowed him to play for cheap popularity or tawdry fame. A stern and uncompromising fighter he worked against heavy odds, but difficulties did not deter him, nor could discouragement chill his unbounded enthusiasm, or embitter his feelings. To-day in Bengal and as a matter of fact in other parts of India there are many repercussions of the thoughts and ideas of the West; problems that vitally affect life, many new ways of

looking at things are engaging the attention of our best minds. At such a time it is fitting that we men of the new age acknowledge our vast debt to him, who enlarged the horizon of Bengali literature, enriched the language, and opened a new vista not only for his contemporaries, but also for future generations.

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	20	5 after again
6	f n , last line	2 for 3
74	f n , first line	1 before f n
79	f n , third line	3 for 8
82	f n	1 before f n
92	3	Confessions for Confession.
95	f n on 'Ropnagar.' p 96	1 after state
97	3	1 after shut up
98	3	1 after way
100	10	2 before f n
101	f n , last line	1 before f n
111	f n ,	1 after strength
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